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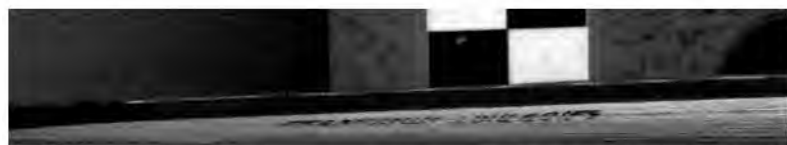
L. Nelson.  
of Form Pipe.  
Wintney. 1900.

Cyril Fitzgerald  
Principal -



THE BEACHCOMBERS  
OR  
SLAVE-TRADING UNDER THE UNION JACK



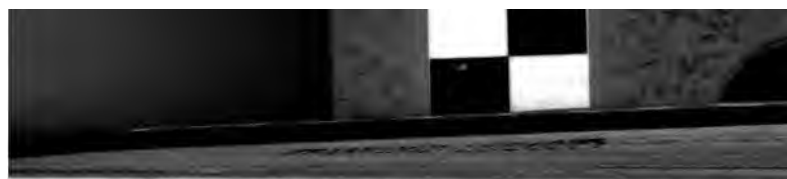




THE FLEET OF DON ALVARO DE MENDANA.

*The Beachcombers]*

*[Frontispiece*



THE

1917

# THE "FACCOMBINS"

THE "FACCOMBINS" OF THE "FACCOMBINS"

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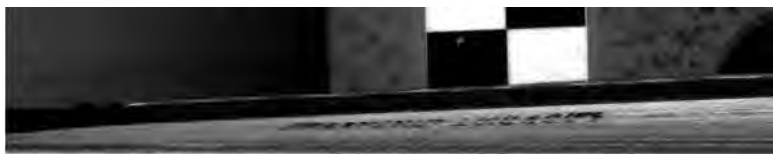
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*Let's look at the...*



# THE BEACHCOMBERS

OR

SLAVE-TRADING UNDER THE UNION JACK

BY

GILBERT BISHOP

'

"Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, Slavery, thou art a bitter draught."—STERNE

*ILLUSTRATED BY HUME NISBET*

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## PREFACE.

THE very air of the Western Pacific seems impregnated with romance. From early in the sixteenth century down to present times the vastest of Earth's oceans has furnished traditions of the most wondrous complexion—legends of exploration and adventure, of piracy and treasure trove, of love and murder, surrounded by a halo of mystery, and enhanced by a certain ideality that not even the rapid spread of prosaic nineteenth century rationalism has had potency to dispel.

The scene of the narrative related in the following pages is laid in the most romantic of the sunny isles of the Pacific—the Solomon Islands—Mendana's historic "Isles of Salomon," the fame of whose fabled mountains of gold and valleys filled with precious stones once upon a time eclipsed even Sinbad's marvellous discoveries in magnificence and outshone the scarcely more substantial splendours of El Dorado and Golconda.

But though there is a tinge of romance in this story, reality is its chief component—solid, unequivocal reality—black, shameful reality. Imagination has had no scope for the conception of aggravated horrors. Only the pen of a Dante could adequately portray the actual enormities of the Polynesian slave trade, by euphemism termed "the labour traffic," herein described in plain, unvarnished terms—in language purposely moderate and unembellished.

The labour traffic episodes that occur in the narrative

are facts—hard, uncompromising, disgraceful truths—of which abundant proofs are to be found among the records of the Australian criminal courts. The evidence given against the supercargo of the schooner *Young Australia* and the captain and others of the brig *Carl* has furnished the majority of the labour traffic incidents herein employed, supplemented, chiefly in minor particulars, by statements communicated to the author by a gentleman whose experience as a Government “labour” agent afforded him ample opportunities for observation, whose candour is beyond question, and who would doubtless have readily accorded this narrative the authority of his name had an opportunity occurred of submitting it to him before publication.

Yet this abominable traffic has been legalised by the colonial Parliaments, and is carried on under the protection of vessels belonging to the British Navy!

The methods adopted by Her Majesty's ships to “bring the islanders to their senses and make them respect white men” are touched upon in the course of the story, but they are even more forcibly illustrated by a report that appeared in the *Daily News* of the 30th January, 1889 (*see* Appendix), which it should be observed was evidently furnished by someone engaged aboard the man of war, consequently the exploits described were not sketched by an unfriendly hand. Further comment is unnecessary; the report speaks for itself.

In these days, when slavery is unfashionable and therefore, wicked; when emancipation has been decreed in Brazil; when a crusade against slavery is being preached in every civilised metropolis; and when the chief European nations have combined to suppress the East African slave trade, is it not unaccountable that a system so horrible that its iniquities could not be exaggerated, and of which the whole truth would be so utterly revolting in its hideous



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atrocities that it could not be published, should not merely be permitted to exist, but that it should actually be fostered and safeguarded by the British Navy?

The enormities herein related are no new development. The detestable traffic has existed for nearly a quarter of a century, in which time very many thousands of natives of the beautiful islands of the Pacific have been ruthlessly entrapped and kidnapped, cruelly treated, and worked to death. The shameful tale has been told again and yet again in pamphlets and blue-books and history, but the effect has been merely transient. Pamphlets, blue-books, and histories are seldom read except by those conversant with the subjects of which they treat. It may happen, however, that a romance embodying some startling incidents of the nefarious system will attract the attention of the British public to the evil, and that more powerful pens will be enlisted to attack the infamous trade, in which event the days of the "labour traffic" are assuredly numbered.

It will thus be apparent that "The Beachcombers" must be placed in the objectionable category of "novels with a purpose"; nevertheless it is hoped that the spice of romance pervading the plot, the faithful portrayal of native customs, and the stirring adventures with which the story abounds will lighten the shadow cast by the barbarous slave trade and will impart intrinsic interest to the narrative.

GILBERT BISHOP.

London, March, 1889.



MAP OF NAPUKAS.



## CHAPTER I.

### KILLED AND EATEN.

"WHITE fellow him finish! Miokona plenty fellow kaikai white fellow!"

The speaker was Birara, a tall, handsome old Solomon Island chief, who, standing in his canoe, gesticulated expressively to emphasise his startling announcement.

The white fellow referred to as "kaikaied," that is, eaten, was an old beachcomber, whose real name had become lost in his sobriquet "Samoan Tom," who had had charge of a trading station for the purchase of beche-de-mer,\* copra,† tortoiseshell, and other island products from the natives, giving in exchange coloured beads, red cloth, knives, axes, and such articles of "trade" as delight the hearts of the islanders.

The person addressed was Captain Birtle, of the schooner *Bonito*, a short, stout, jovial-looking sailor, with a complexion but a few shades lighter than that of the Solomon Islander. He was the head of an extensive system of trading amongst the Western Pacific Islands, and had just sailed through the opening in the reef, intending to ship the produce purchased by Samoan Tom, and to replenish his agent's stock of "trade" and provisions before proceeding to Sydney with the cargo gathered from the various stations throughout the islands.

\* A sea slug, highly appreciated by Chinese epicures.

† Dried cocoa-nut kernel.



Miokona, the accredited cannibal, was the chief of a powerful tribe living among the hills a short distance inland.

"What for Miokona maté white fellow?" inquired Captain Birtle, in the sandalwood English so readily understood by every native race throughout the Pacific.

"White fellow too muchy tokelau toddy, \* show um plenty bacca, plenty bokkus (boxes), plenty eberyting. Miokona want. White fellow no give. Miokona ten one fellow finish white fellow."

"Ah!" said Captain Birtle, turning to Simmonds, the mate; "it's the old story. Tom couldn't keep off the toddy, an' 's soon's he got drunk he shows Miokona all the "trade," an' of course Miokona killed him an' looted the store. Likely enough Birara there, though he gammons to be so angry, had a hand in the business."

After a few more questions had been asked and answered, Captain Birtle ordered two boats out and went ashore to ascertain the actual state of affairs, the second boat lying off the shore, the crew having their rifles ready to cover the retreat of the landing party in the event of the natives attempting any treachery.

From experience Captain Birtle was wise enough not to expect to find much of either the "trade" he had left when he last visited Napuka, as Birara's village was named, or of the produce for which some of it had been bartered away. Nor in this respect was he disappointed; everything portable had been carried off. Still, he was agreeably surprised to find that the store building had suffered no damage, which he attributed to the circumstance that the *Bonito* had appeared a little earlier than Miokona and his people had anticipated, and thus they had missed their opportunity to dismantle the house or to burn it down, as they would certainly have done, to obtain

\* An intoxicating liquor obtained from the cocoa-nut palm.



the nails, that have a high commercial value among the islanders.

The spot upon which Birara's village stood was the realisation of a poet's dream of fairyland. The limpid waters of the tiny bay, hemmed in by low headlands fringed with feathery palms, lay glistening in the sunlight, edged with a beach whose snowy whiteness was enhanced by contrast with the dark green foliage and sombre shadows of the thick undergrowth covering the low hills behind the village, and extending almost to the water's edge. The tall and graceful cocoa-nut and sago palms, the brightly coloured crotons, orchids, hibiscus, and other flowers, and the birds of gorgeous plumage added their characteristic charms to the scene, which was fittingly completed by the luminous sky, unflecked by a solitary fleecy cloud—a glowing opal dome, without a single flaw.

The ceaseless break of the long ocean swell upon the encircling reef filled the air with a dreamy hum, rising and falling with rhythmical cadence; now bursting into a subdued roar as a pellucid crest dissolved into a cataract of gleaming spray, and the wave, crowned with a garland of snowy foam, dashed onward till arrested by the irresistible coral barrier; and then, with wonderful diminuendo effect, sinking to a drowsy, whispering murmur as the ebbing wave gathered strength for a renewed onslaught.

Within the coral girdle the azure blue water was scarcely disturbed by a single ripple, and was so clear that "full fathoms five" could be seen the fantastic forms of the branching coral—blue, green, amber, and rose; the ever-undulating seaweed of every hue and shade; the swarming thousands of aquatic creatures, and the shells of strange shape and vivid colouring, as well as the brilliantly tinted finny inhabitants of that liquid Paradise.



Dame Nature was, indeed, unsparing of her brightest pigments when she designed this portion of her wide domain.

Within a few yards of the beach, on a small plateau, were the houses of Birara's tribe—beehive-like erections, set upon posts two or three feet high, in the midst of the village being the ofilau, or club-house, in which the young men slept, and where most of the ceremonies of the tribe were celebrated; while aloft, amid the branches of one of the tallest trees, on a slight eminence near the shore, was the house of refuge from the fierce head-hunters, who made frequent raids from the neighbouring islands in quest of their horrible trophies.

On the left of the village stood the trader's store, embowered in brilliantly flowering creepers and surrounded by a strong palisade—a regular *chevaux-de-frise*—the threatening spikes of which had the appearance of an effective barrier against any force of naked assailants. The house was substantially built of rough planks, the door being heavily bolted and barred and the window openings furnished with massive shutters, so that its inmate had little to fear from the primitive weapons of his cannibal neighbours in the event of an attack.

Having ascertained the extent of Miokona's depredations, Captain Birtle returned to the schooner, and calling the white portion of his crew into the cabin, asked which of them would volunteer to fill Samoan Tom's place, pointing out the great value of the station, and the absolute necessity to retain it, as otherwise some rival would be certain to step in and carry on the trade that had been established with so much difficulty and danger. But the trader's arguments, though irrefutable, failed to dispel the impression created by Samoan Tom's tragic fate; the men were unanimous in their refusal of the appointment, notwithstanding that the captain offered



increased pay and a liberal commission upon the results of the trade.

Eventually Captain Birtle, unable to overcome the men's reluctance, exclaimed angrily: "I'll take the station myself, you cowardly set of lubbers; an' you, Simmonds, shall take the ship down to Sydney, an' see whether you can pick up on your way some fellow with a heart in him who'll take the store."

So the store was replenished, Captain Birtle took up his quarters ashore, and the *Bonito* sailed for Sydney.

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## CHAPTER II.

### RETROSPECTIVE.

LEAVING Captain Birtle for a time in his perilous position—that after all was not so perilous to a man of the trader's experience of the native character—it may be well to briefly review the train of circumstances which placed him in that position.

Early in the fifties, Richard Birtle—or “Dicky Bird's tail,” as his facetious associates named him—was the mate of a collier plying between the Tyne and the Thames, who, being seized with the prevailing gold fever, joined the thousands flocking to Australia. He shipped as an A.B. aboard a clipper bound for Melbourne, and in due time arrived in Hobson's Bay, where the vessel anchored in the midst of a veritable forest of masts. There lay hundreds of ships, that had brought thousands of eager goldseekers from all parts of the world, unable to leave port in consequence of captains and crews having deserted to “try their luck” at the diggings.

Birtle followed the example set him by many better men and deserted from his ship. He hurried off to the goldfields and tried his luck, first at Forest Creek, then at the famous Bendigo, and afterwards at the celebrated Ballarat; but it was not Birtle's luck to strike a rich patch. He followed the excited hunt from “rush” to “rush,” but he was not one of the fortunate few who “made their piles.” He “got the colour” and he was

able to "make his tucker," as in digging parlance is expressed the fact that he secured a very small quantity of the precious metal, just enough to pay for his food; but the fortune or "pile" he so often talked of and dreamt of eluded his grasp.

Eventually, disheartened by failure, he resumed his seafaring life, and became the master of a small brig employed in the coasting trade. The discovery of gold in New Zealand, however, caused his vessel to be sent across to Hokitika, and once more he was constrained to try his luck at the diggings, for his men deserted and he found it impossible to get together another crew to take the brig back to Melbourne. Ill-luck still attended him; again his goldseeking left him penniless and drove him to take service afloat; so after a couple of years he turned up in Auckland as the master of a small schooner trading to the South Sea Islands.

It required but a single voyage to convince Captain Birtle that this trade was far richer in profit than any gold mine of his experience. The natives readily bartered sandalwood, cocoa-nuts, bananas, tortoiseshell, and curiosities of all sorts for articles of infinitesimal value. A thimbleful of beads or a scrap of hoop-iron would purchase island produce that would realise a pound in Auckland; a fragment of red cloth would be eagerly accepted in exchange for a hundred cocoa-nuts, or a toy mirror as adequate payment for a pig.

Thenceforth Captain Birtle's ambition was to possess a craft to take part in the island trade on his own behalf. He availed himself of every opportunity for conducting a little private barter with the natives, and by keen bargaining and rigid economy he was able in a couple of years to purchase and equip a smart little cutter, with which he commenced operations on a small scale.

The result of his venture exceeded Birtle's most

sanguine expectations, for his knowledge of the Polynesian dialects and character, his firmness and sobriety, and his unflinching good humour and passable honesty, which the natives soon learned to appreciate, gave him an immense advantage over his less scrupulous competitors, who seldom neglected an opportunity for cheating and who frequently ill-treated the islanders when there was much delay in settling a bargain.

Birtle was soon able to purchase a larger vessel and to extend his operations far beyond the limits of other traders, and at the time this story opens he had for years carried on an extensive and lucrative business by means of agents located on various islands throughout most of the important groups of the Western Pacific, among whom the *Bonito* kept up pretty regular communication, replenishing their stocks of "trade" and provisions and conveying the purchased produce to Australia.

The selection of his agents was Captain Birtle's greatest difficulty. The men willing to take up their residence among ferocious savages and inveterate cannibals were necessarily few, even though the rate of pay and the perquisites were liberal; so the trader's choice was generally limited to some of the greatest vagabonds on the earth—"beachcombers"—whose histories would scarcely have borne investigation, and whose retirement from the more frequented haunts of men was not always a matter of choice but of expediency; in fact, many of these agents were simply fugitives from justice, and in the Western Pacific at that time—as they are even now in a limited degree—such characters were comfortably confident that they were beyond the reach of the arm of the law. Courageous they were, for no coward would live long amidst the Pacific Islanders. Fearlessness and sobriety were their only safeguards against their treacherous neighbours, and, as appeared in Samoan Tom's case,



the slightest lapse involved swift and terrible punishment.

Thus already Captain Birtle was a rich man. He had accomplished the object with which he left his native land—he had “made his pile,” though not by gold digging; but the fascination of the adventurous life still enthralled him. He revelled in the daily and hourly dangers through which he passed, and he had as yet never so much as contemplated “retiring from business,” nor even thought of taking a partner to relieve him of the more active supervision of his agents.





## CHAPTER III.

### AMONG THE CANNIBALS.

CAPTAIN BIRTLE was soon quite at home at Napuka, and the islanders were not slow to recognise that a style of man very different from Samoan Tom had settled amongst them. Large quantities of produce were brought to the store and purchased, until it was evident to the trader that his murdered agent had either been foolishly liberal in his dealings with the natives or knavishly dishonest towards his employer; for when the stock of "trade" had been but slightly diminished the collection of còpra, tortoise, and pearl shell, beche-de-mer, and other goods was far larger than had ever before been shipped from that station.

Birara and his tribe persisted in their denial of complicity in the murder of the agent and the subsequent robbery, throwing the entire blame for the outrage upon Miokona, who studiously refrained from visiting the village.

Captain Birtle, however, sent messengers to Miokona, offering to pardon the murder and to say nothing about the stolen "trade" if restitution was made of the purchased produce. This may seem a cold-blooded proceeding, but it was really a very wise and far-sighted policy. The trader argued that Samoan Tom had forfeited his life by his foolishness, and that it was no one's business—certainly not his—to avenge his agent's death. Then it was absolutely essential to the captain's safety, as well as to



the success of his trade, that a chief so powerful as Miokona should be friendly. Captain Birtle would willingly have resumed cordial relations with Miokona without the restitution of any of the produce, but such a proceeding would have been in the highest degree impolitic, for it would have given the native the idea that he was feared. So the trader demanded the return of the stolen produce, well knowing that to Miokona it was comparatively worthless, for no one but the captain or his agent would purchase it, and it was of no intrinsic value to the islanders.

For a time Miokona resisted every blandishment and rejected every overture of friendship; but eventually his suspicions were allayed, and in a shamefaced manner he sent the women back with the goods, and soon after sealed the reconciliation by personally presenting the trader with some pigeons and accepting in return a couple of sticks of tobacco.

The obstacle having been overcome, trade went on very satisfactorily, and Captain Birtle, being now at liberty to turn his attention to cultivating business relations with the neighbouring tribes, made repeated excursions up and down the coast and to the adjacent islands.

When on one of these expeditions, the trader's native crew paddled through an immense natural archway instead of rounding the point much farther out, and Captain Birtle found himself in a landlocked bay that he had never previously visited or even observed. On all sides were precipitous cliffs, the narrow opening by which he had entered and an equally narrow passage on the opposite side being apparently the only means of access to this sheltered haven.

As an experienced navigator of those seas, Captain Birtle could not fail to recognise the value of such a refuge for trading vessels to run to during the hurricane months,

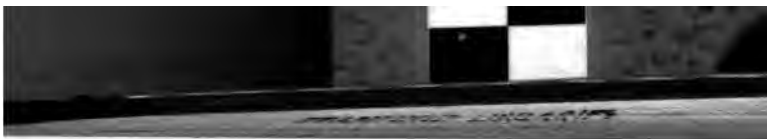
when it was often almost impossible to find a place of safety; and, in order to ascertain whether the place was in other respects as well suited to the purpose he had in view, he directed his crew to land him on a narrow strip of beach he pointed to near the head of the bay.

The islanders, however, excitedly refused to comply with his order, declaring Kanaputa, as they named the place, to be tambu (sacred) as the haunt of a toberran (devil). This superstitious avoidance of the spot by the natives naturally increased its attractiveness in the eyes of Captain Birtle, besides whetting his curiosity, and his desire to explore it was still further heightened when one of the natives exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with alarm :

“ My word ! Big one fellow toberran longa there. Plenty fangolu (angry) white fellow go. Kill white fellow. Kill ebervbody.”

But Captain Birtle persisted in his determination, and by a liberal present of “ 'bacca ” at last overcame the natives' objections, though he could not allay their fears, and they very cautiously approached the beach until the captain was able to spring ashore, when the islanders hurriedly paddled out some distance and awaited events, which they evidently expected to be tragical.

At first it seemed that nothing remarkable existed to repay Captain Birtle for his trouble, the cliffs rising abruptly within a few yards of the water, and no way of reaching the summit presenting itself. The trader, however, after proceeding about a quarter of a mile along the beach, noticed a rift in the cliffs, and, upon rounding a projection of the rock, came in sight of a narrow gorge that seemed to penetrate obliquely into the heart of the cliff. Through this ran a clear, shallow stream, which Captain Birtle was pleased to find was fresh water, and, arguing that, being fresh, it must have an inland source, he determined to explore it, thinking that by following its



course he would discover a way of reaching the summit of the cliffs.

He had not proceeded far up the gorge when it came to an abrupt end, the stream issuing from a large opening in the rock. This was manifestly the haunt of the traditional toberran of which the natives were so greatly afraid, and it required no very intimate knowledge of the islands to understand that a very formidable devil indeed, in the shape of an alligator, might reasonably be expected to haunt such a spot. Not being armed for an encounter with game of that description, and having, besides, no means of lighting the dark recesses of the cavern from which the stream issued, Captain Birtle retraced his steps, resolving, however, to take an early opportunity to revisit the place, provided with torches and armed with a rifle.

A circumstance that served to confirm the trader in this determination was the flight of a multitude of small birds from the cave as he stood at the opening and peered in, for in them he recognised the builders of the curious edible nests so highly appreciated by Chinese epicures; and though these nests were the most profitable of all the kinds of island produce, the supply had hitherto been both scanty and uncertain.

The natives were reassured when they saw Captain Birtle re-appear, and they lost no time in getting him into the canoe again and continuing their interrupted journey.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A CURIOUS NECKLACE.

WHEN making another excursion along the coast, Captain Birtle visited Matuko, a village of which a villainous-looking old islander named Kerewa was the chief, upon whose dusky shoulders the trader noticed a very peculiar necklace. It was composed of a number of metal discs alternating with carefully rounded pieces of shell, similar to the dewarra, or money, current among the islanders, threaded upon a piece of native string, made from the fronds of the cocoa-nut palm.

The regularity of the size of the metal discs suggested to the trader that they were coins or medals, and a closer examination confirmed this supposition, though the metal of which they were composed was doubtful, they were so dirty and discoloured.

"Kurukurua (necklace) how muchy?" enquired Captain Birtle.

"No sell kurukurua," replied the wily savage. "Kurukurua plenty manu (lucky)."

But Captain Birtle produced some very bright buttons, an enticement Kerewa could not resist. So a bargain was soon struck, and for two sticks of tobacco, an axe, a few beads, and a button for each coin, the necklace became the trader's property,

When Captain Birtle returned to Napuka, he critically examined his purchase and, though he found

the coins badly battered and defaced—the process of piercing them for threading having been performed with rude native implements—he was able to decipher a few words in a language he did not understand, but which he believed to be Spanish, while the weight of the coins convinced him they were made of gold, and he congratulated himself upon having secured a valuable prize.

Captain Birtle soon visited Matuko again, intending to try to elicit from Kerewa whence he obtained the coins; but Kerewa, he was told, was absent on a fishing excursion, and none of the other natives could say where the coins had come from.

The trader was obliged to be extremely cautious when making his enquiries, for the islanders are very keen to perceive when especial value is placed upon any article they possess; and often when they imagine the traders are eager to purchase, such an exorbitant price is demanded that business comes to a deadlock. This is a prolific cause of quarrels between the traders and the natives, which have frequently terminated in fatal encounters and treacherous massacres.

Captain Birtle, however, had had too long an apprenticeship to his business to make such a mistake; so he pretended to be greatly dissatisfied with his recent bargain and to wish to barter the necklace for copra, beche-de-mer, or other goods, stating that the coins were worth very little to him because of the large holes drilled in them. The trader knew he could safely make such an offer because he had recently purchased the entire stock of produce from the village.

Having allowed several weeks to elapse, Captain Birtle once more journeyed to Matuko, and on this occasion Kerewa came forward to greet him, wearing a resplendent necklace of brass buttons, among which the trader was

secretly pleased to observe a few coins similar to those he had purchased.

After some unimportant conversation, Captain Birtle, with the utmost caution, approached the subject of his visit, protesting that Kerewa had had much the best of the bargain when he had exchanged his dirty old necklace for a bright new one. The trader assured the islander that the coins were "paitena" (bad) on account of the large holes in them, and he again proposed to exchange the necklace for native produce.

"Plenty all same no hole," replied Kerewa, falling into the trap so skilfully laid for him; and going into his house he returned with a handful of broad gold pieces that had not been pierced, the few on the necklace being the only ones his wives had had time to drill.

Captain Birtle's power of self-control was tested to the utmost by the sight of the money, for the thought flashed through his brain that Kerewa had discovered a secret treasure, of which numberless traditions are current in every part of the Pacific. While maintaining an appearance of profound indifference the trader's keen wits were actively employed weighing various schemes to extract from the savage the locality of the "find."

Kerewa on his part was unable to conceal his suspicions; and though he was evidently willing to barter away the coins he could not make up his mind as to their value. He commenced, therefore, by insisting upon receiving a musket for each coin, that being the highest standard of value there as everywhere else throughout the islands, a musket being equivalent to a patent of nobility and therefore a coveted prize for every ambitious islander.

"Too muchy, Kerewa. Abu ai kepo" (I do not want them) replied the Captain, ridiculing the demand as outrageous, and asserting that such a small number as Kerewa possessed were comparatively worthless, as they

were insufficient to make a long necklace (kurukurua). The trader offered lafulu (ten) sticks of tobacco for latu (100) coins, but he said he would not accept lafulu-onoma (16) as a teletafala (present).

The cunning old chief's doubts were, however, still in the ascendant, and by no method of argument could Captain Bartle convince him that the coins were not very valuable; so the trader had finally to return to Napuka without accomplishing the object of his mission, though, as he felt certain of having no competitor, he was confident of eventually succeeding.

He was not surprised, therefore, when on the following day a messenger arrived from Kerewa inviting the trader to again visit Matuko. To dissemble his eagerness, Captain Birtle sent word to Kerewa that he was too busy just then, but that he intended going down the coast in about a month, when he would stop at Matuko as he passed.

Kerewa, however, was too impatient to wait a month; he sent message after message to the trader to induce him to re-open the bargain, and when it seemed to Captain Birtle that he had tired the old chief into complacency, he went to Matuko and offered pisavulu (30) sticks of tobacco for latu (100) coins, asserting, however, that he would not buy less than latu; he said he would only buy tapoina (many), if Kerewa had them to sell.

Then the bargaining recommenced; but the trader's mind was at ease, for it soon became evident that his guess that Kerewa had discovered a hidden treasure was correct. The native wanted to know whether Captain Birtle would buy "many hundreds," which plainly indicated that he had an extensive stock to draw from. Of course the captain assented, and then the islander demanded latu tambac (100 sticks of tobacco) and fatiavulu (40) pipes for latu coins.



And thus the negotiation proceeded, with dissimulating carelessness on the one side and suspicious covetousness on the other, until the Captain's superior intelligence triumphed, and Kerewa admitted having found "big one fellow bokkus," and agreed to show the trader where the coins were to be obtained; Captain Birtle on his part undertaking to give Kerewa at the rate of three buttons, or one stick of tobacco, or a pipeful of beads, or a clay pipe for each coin, or a red cotton handkerchief or an axe for ten coins, or a musket for every hundred coins.

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## CHAPTER V.

### A TREASURE SHIP.

ON an appointed day, Captain Birtle accompanied Kerewa in a small canoe some distance along the coast, paddling quietly over the smooth water within the reef. In about an hour after leaving Matuko they rounded a thickly wooded headland and came in sight of a narrow opening in the reef, towards which Kerewa proceeded. When they arrived opposite this opening, Kerewa pointed excitedly over the edge of the canoe, and the trader, peering into the disturbed water, indistinctly perceived the remains of what seemed to be a rather large vessel.

Captain Birtle and Kerewa landed on the reef, and the trader, following the islander's instructions, plunged his head beneath the surface of the water, and was thus enabled to distinguish everything at the bottom of the sea, which was about four fathoms deep.

There lay the vessel, having apparently foundered after entering the lagoon by the passage, which, besides being shallow, was much too narrow to safely admit a ship of such breadth of beam. The vessel appeared to have been borne forward until the receding wave had allowed her to crash upon the jagged coral, whose cruel points had torn a terrible chasm in the vessel's side, the masts probably breaking at the same moment within a foot of the deck. Subsequent waves must have lifted the vessel off the reef

and driven her into the lagoon, where, securely protected against further buffeting, the brave old ship had found 'a fitting resting place.

The captain was surprised to notice that the vessel had a high, elaborately carved stern, bluff bows, and a general contour altogether different from ships of the present day. It was evidently not the hull of any trading ship, or of a vessel that had sailed the seas for several generations, but of some craft of a former age.

Several things connected with the discovery greatly puzzled Captain Birtle. One was the singularity of the circumstance that the wreck had lain so long unnoticed, for the natives must have passed over the spot hundreds of times in canoes, as they used this passage in certain states of the weather when crossing to and from a neighbouring island. But the trader explained this by remembering the indistinctness with which he had seen the wreck, even when Kerewa had directed his attention to it, the broken waves rushing through the passage in the reef obscuring the view beneath the surface, though on either side of the opening the water of the lagoon was as translucent as crystal.

Kerewa confirmed this supposition by recounting the manner in which he had made the discovery. It appeared that the chief, accompanied by another of his tribe, went to the opening to fish, and that a fishing spear thrown at a boila—a large fish of a bright blue colour—missed its aim, but stuck fast in the hull of the vessel. Kerewa, surprised that the spear did not float, ordered his companion to dive in search of it. The native did so, and thus discovered the wreck, from which Kerewa had from time to time taken whatever pieces of iron he could readily detach; for with the promptness of decision that characterises all great men, he secured the monopoly of the treasure trove by straightway killing his follower; and he had been

extremely careful to keep the discovery secret from the other members of his tribe.

The discovery of the money happened when Kerewa was breaking a piece of iron from a strongly braced chest that lay upon the deck. The native dived by attaching a heavy stone to his feet, and with this he hammered the chest, the lid of which readily succumbed to his blows; and, collapsing, disclosed an immense number of the coins that Captain Birtle was so desirous to obtain.

Another circumstance that caused the trader much surprise was the comparatively excellent state of preservation of the timber of the wreck, as well as its freedom from marine parasites and incrustations; but both these peculiarities he attributed to the fact that, though lying exactly opposite the passage through the reef, the wreck was protected from the force of the waves by the coral wall, over which the vessel had been lifted, that extended across the opening to within about two fathoms of the surface of the water. Thus the waves breaking through the passage rushed over the wreck without disturbing it, and the constantly eddying water helped to prevent the accumulation upon its timbers of barnacle-like growths.

Taking another look at the wreck, Captain Birtle observed the position and size of the "bokkus," as Kerewa called the chest, from which many of the coins had been scattered upon the deck. It appeared to be an elaborately carved, iron-bound coffer, about 3 feet long and 18 inches in width and depth, and it seemed to be almost full of money similar to that which Kerewa had sold to the trader. The chest had evidently been brought from below when the vessel struck on the reef, but whether the ill-fated castaways were unable to land before the ship foundered, or whether the conviction of the uselessness of money on a savage island caused the first intention to be abandoned, will never be known.

Captain Birtle's next anxiety was to devise suitable means to raise the treasure. Kerewa protesting his incapacity to dive for the coins, for which work, indeed, his advanced age coupled with his obese habit rendered him decidedly ineligible. The objections to imparting the secret to other islanders were obvious, and Kerewa would not listen to such a proposal; yet there seemed no other course open, except to wait until the Captain obtained a diving dress and apparatus from Australia, and even that would involve the cognisance of one or more of the crew, in none of whom the trader was inclined to place implicit reliance when exposed to such a temptation as the sight of so much gold would be.

An ingenious expedient suggested by Kerewa was tried, but it was merely temporarily successful. The native went ashore, and after a diligent search returned exclaiming, "Tabepatu! tabepatu!" and exhibiting a strange-looking creature that he held very carefully by one of its antennæ. This, weighted with a stone, he fastened to a long cord, and lowering it into the water, allowed it to sink until, with some difficulty, he was able to drop it into the chest containing the money. The animal at once seized upon a number of the coins, and, when it was hoisted into the canoe by the cord, brought them to the surface in its grip; but unfortunately the tabepatu proved to be no amphibian, a second immersion resulting in its death.

The natives find much amusement in playing with this remarkable creature, which somewhat resembles an immense beetle. They place it upon a stone or cocoa-nut, to which it immediately clings, and notwithstanding the roughest treatment it will not relinquish its hold until allowed to remain for a time unmolested. The natives have to be extremely careful, however, that the tabepatu, when its claws are unemployed, does not seize a naked foot or leg, for in that event it is almost impossible to



dislodge it, every attempt to do so causing it to drive its sharp claws deeper and to cling more tenaciously.

No other practicable method suggesting itself, Kerewa was at last induced to accede to Captain Birtle's proposal to employ a native of Napuka, who in early days of the Australian pearl fishery had been engaged as a diver, and the trader managed the delicate negotiation so astutely that he secured the diver's services and his silence by agreeing to pay him according to the number of coins he brought to the surface and threatening to employ a rival diver if the existence of the wreck became known to the other natives.

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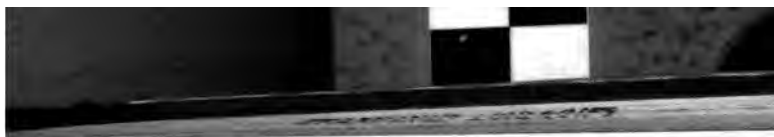
## CHAPTER VI.

### EMBARRAS DE RICHESSES.

THE diver went to work, and Captain Birtle, in a state of feverish joy and excitement, watched the treasure coming slowly to the surface. To avert suspicious prying, the work was not carried on continuously, but as frequently as he dared the trader called for the diver, and away they paddled to Matuko, where they were joined by Kerewa in his canoe, and, under the pretence of pearl shelling or fishing, they went leisurely down the lagoon, until they arrived at the opening in the reef. The outriggers of the two canoes were then lashed firmly together, and, anchored with a line to each side of the entrance, the little craft rode the waves directly above the wreck.

The diver worked well, but the stock of coins in the coffer decreased but slowly. The troubles of diving were numerous, for the rush of water through the passage rendered it very difficult to descend upon the wreck, and when the deck had been reached the eddying water often carried the native off his feet, though they were weighted with stones; and sometimes the diving had to be suspended on account of the sea being too rough to allow the canoes to remain above the wreck; so that, much to the captain's annoyance, only about two days a week on an average could be devoted to this exceedingly lucrative kind of fishing.

Still, the trader's stock of gold pieces steadily grew,



until he began to be alarmed for the safety of his wealth and to be nervous lest someone should hear of the riches in his possession. His fears were heightened by the somewhat unfriendly disposition exhibited by Miokona, with whom the trader had been unable to establish really cordial relations; and the situation was still further complicated by rumors of an impending attack upon Napuka by a numerous horde of head-hunters from the Island of Bougainville.

The Napukans were busily engaged making defensive preparations, carrying large quantities of food, water, and missiles up to the tree-house, built amid the branches, nearly 150 feet from the ground. Up and down the long swinging ladder crawled the women and girls, from dawn till dark, conveying small loads at each journey, for the ascent and descent were by no means easy, nor was the ladder capable of sustaining a very heavy load. The men were equally busy, making and repairing bows, arrows, and spears; dipping the tips in a poisonous liquid made from a variety of euphorbia, or thrusting them into a putrefying dead body.

The Napukans did not hesitate to demand the trader's assistance to drive off their dreaded foes; and self-interest, if not friendship, disposed him to accede to their importunities. He would not, however, definitely pledge himself to fight on the side of the Napukans, though he allowed them to expect his support, for he wished them to continue their preparations for defence so assiduously that they would not have time to pry into his proceedings.

But their anxiety that he should be always at hand to lend them the invincible protection of his rifle caused them to be watchful, and to object to his repeated absences from the village, and in this respect popular feeling became so pronounced at last that he had for several weeks to abandon the salving of the golden hoard.



This enforced idleness—for very little trade could be done while the excitement continued—was excessively irksome to the trader, but he employed himself by preparing a hiding-place for the treasure. In the inner room of the store he dug a deep hole, in which he placed a large biscuit barrel, and in this he deposited the coins. He carefully filled in the earth around and above the barrel, and levelled the surface so as to make it impossible to detect that the ground had been disturbed. He provided for adding to his hoard by having a bamboo projecting through a hole in the top of the barrel, down which he dropped the gold pieces one by one. In an emergency the bamboo could be withdrawn, and the hole in the earth through which it passed filled up, and then no clue to the concealed treasure would be apparent on the surface.

Captain Birtle had completed his preparations, but the expected enemy did not put in an appearance, and once more time hung heavily on the trader's hands. He hesitated to visit the wreck, because the Napukans so closely watched all his movements, as they feared he would be absent in the moment of danger; so he resolved to revisit Kanaputa, where he had discovered the cave, intending to thoroughly explore the course of the stream and to collect a quantity of the edible birds' nests.

The Napukans demurred to the proposed expedition, though it would not take the trader far from the village, and they endeavoured to persuade the captain to abandon the project, until, finally, he threatened to take up his residence at Matuko, and to obtain a crew from that village. Such a prospect was too disastrous to be accepted by the Napukans, so they gave way and provided the crew, besides preparing a number of torches from the dried fronds of the cocoa-nut palm. Captain Birtle took his rifle and an ample supply of cartridges, to be prepared for a crocodile should he encounter such an antagonist.

The superstitions of the islanders had not been dissipated by the trader's immunity from harm on the occasion of his previous visit to Kanaputa ; and their fear, as they approached the tambu beach, was as keen as ever. The captain, however, persuaded them to land him, but not one of them would consent to bear him company ; so, loaded with the stock of torches, fastened upon his back after the manner of a knapsack, and carrying his rifle ready for any emergency, he made his way to the mouth of the cavern.

Again, as he peered in, hundreds of alarmed birds flew past him, and when he applied a match to one of the torches, after he had waded some distance up the stream, he was almost stunned by the myriads of birds and bats that, attracted by the light, dashed against him. After a time, however, they became accustomed to the torch or frightened at it, for they ceased to flutter around it, and the trader was able to proceed with his exploration.

He cautiously followed the course of the stream, and was pleased to notice, as he went forward, that the sides and roof of the cave were literally covered with nests. The captain had not proceeded far, however, when the sides closed suddenly together, and he found himself at the end of the cavern ; the stream gushing out of a low tunnel, scarcely wide enough to admit the trader's broad shoulders, and so low that he had to crouch down in the water to obtain a view up the course of the stream. At first Captain Birtle thought of retracing his steps, but he did not like to abandon his project of following the stream to its source, so he stooped down and somewhat painfully groped his way along.

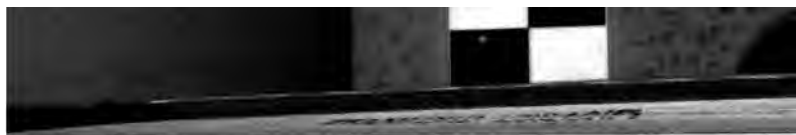
Soon the water deepened, and though this enabled the trader to regain an upright posture and to proceed more easily, he was obliged to hold his rifle above his head and to raise the bundle of torches up to his shoulders to keep

them dry and serviceable. For nearly a quarter-of-a-mile he followed the windings of the tunnel until it gradually widened out into a second cavern, much larger than the one he had passed through. There were no birds' nests on the walls, but beautiful stalactites and stalagmites glistened in the torchlight, some of the stalactites giving forth a resonant bell-like sound when struck.

The stream again became shallow, and the trader was able to proceed rapidly forward for a few hundred yards, when he perceived a gleam of light some distance ahead. He quickly made his way to the opening and looked forth upon a lovely little glen, encircled by precipitous cliffs fully a hundred feet in height. The place resembled a beautiful but neglected garden, filled with luxuriant undergrowth, but having no large trees or palms. Down the rocks on the side opposite the entrance to the cavern dashed a sparkling cascade, and from the deep pool hollowed out at the foot of the cliff trickled the stream that wound like a silver thread across the miniature valley, and disappeared into the cavern to find its subterranean way to the sea.

Captain Birtle made the circuit of the glen, but could discover no practicable way of reaching the summit of the cliffs, and a further inspection of the place convinced him that he was in the crater of an extinct volcano, in which opinion he was confirmed by noticing the character of the vegetation, that had evidently not been long established.

Somewhat disappointed at the result of his exploration, Captain Birtle was about to re-enter the cavern on his way back to the canoe, when it occurred to him that such a spot would be eminently suitable as a hiding-place for his treasure. It was evident that a very considerable time would elapse before the whole of the gold in the coffer could be raised, and the trader had determined to thoroughly search the vessel for more treasure when the coffer had been emptied, for which purpose he intended to



despatch the schooner, as soon as she re-appeared, to Australia for some blasting powder or dynamite to blow up the wreck. The cache in the store where he had hidden the gold, though fairly secure, was exposed to various dangers. Miokona threatened to become troublesome, and if he took the trader by surprise he might burn the store and discover the treasure. The head-hunters, too, might prove victorious, and, when looting the store, might find the coins.

Maturely considering all these circumstances the captain came to the determination to hide the gold in the cavern, especially as he remembered that no native would dare to set foot in the place from fear of the terrible toberran.

Captain Birtle was a man of action, with whom planning involved prompt performance; so he immediately re-entered the cave and selected with much care a spot suited to his purpose. He examined the cavern until he found a narrow opening into a small grotto, the entrance to which he noticed could be completely concealed by placing before it a tall stalagmite that he had accidentally overturned, the calcareous growth having had but an insecure foundation in the friable rock that formed the floor of the cave. With much difficulty he moved the stalagmite into position, and satisfied that a more secure hiding-place could not be found he hastened back to the beach, taking the precaution, however, to carry with him a number of the edible nests, which he intended to be the ostensible object for repeated visits to the cavern.



## CHAPTER VII.

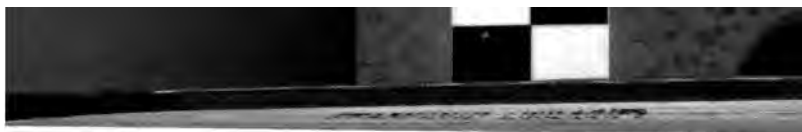
### THE HEAD-HUNTERS.

NAPUKA continued in a state of ferment in anticipation of the descent of the fierce head-hunters from the Island of Bougainville, but day succeeded day and yet the vigilant watch that was kept from the tree-house failed to espy the dreaded fleet of canoes.

Captain Birtle made good use of the time at his disposal, and in half-a-dozen visits to the cave he had transported the whole of his stock of coins to their new hiding place, conveying them in a leathern game bag and returning with it filled with the edible nests.

His task had scarcely been accomplished when, early one morning, the look-out man signalled that the head-hunters were in sight, and soon sixteen large canoes, each containing about twenty men, were seen rounding the point and making for the entrance. By this time every soul of the Napukans had clambered up to the tree-house, the men standing on the platform armed with bows, arrows, slings, and spears, and the women crouching behind, ready at the approach of the enemy to cast down stones and other missiles upon their heads.

The head-hunters were evidently disappointed at finding the people of Napuka prepared to resist them, and when the canoes had entered the lagoon a prolonged consultation was held as to the course to be pursued. Eventually it was decided to carry out the raid on the village, and the



canoes were headed for the landing-place and driven through the water at racing speed.

The Solomon Islanders surpass all other natives of the Pacific as expert canoe builders, and the craft in which the head-hunters had traversed hundreds of miles of turbulent sea were magnificent specimens of their skill. They rode the water as gracefully as swans, and, with the many paddles keeping absolutely perfect time to the weird, exciting chant of the warriors, the speed attained was marvellously swift. The canoes were built of planks, bent and firmly held together by strong thwarts, and fastened and caulked with a kind of gum. These war canoes were long and narrow, and had no outriggers; the bows were shaped to resemble alligator's heads, the sterns rising like the prow of a gondola and ornamented with human heads, the sides being beautifully carved and inlaid with minute pieces of shells in the most elaborate designs.

Captain Birtle had taken every precaution against being plundered. The opening in the palisade had been filled with sharp stakes, so that the store was surrounded by a very formidable barricade, that to naked assailants was practically insurmountable. The door was shut and barred, and the window openings were covered with strong shutters.

On came the head-hunters, shouting their war cry and challenging the Napukans to come down from the tree-house and fight, threatening to burn down the tree and to kill and eat every one of them.

As the canoes approached the landing-place, a well-directed flight of arrows discharged from the platform of the tree-house disabled several of the head-hunters who were paddling, and for a moment the fleet was thrown into disorder. A second shower of arrows followed, and several of the canoes having fouled and become stationary, even greater execution was done than at the first discharge.

The head-hunters, however, soon recovered their coolness and dashed for the beach, which they gained just as another volley was sent at them. Again several of the enemy were wounded, but the remainder rushed up the beach and took shelter among the trees, where they paused to recover breath and to arrange their plan of action.

There was no occasion for prolonged deliberation; the head-hunters were accustomed to conflicts of this sort. Soon about twenty of the warriors sallied forth from among the trees, and getting beneath one of the houses, severed the cords that bound it to the posts, and then, lifting the house bodily, carried it to the foot of the tree in which the Napukans had taken refuge. The besieged expended many arrows in trying to arrest the onward march of the house-bearers, but the cover afforded by the overhanging thatch of the roof enabled this strategic movement to be executed without the loss of a man.

The enemy's plan of operations was of the simplest description; they lodged the house at the foot of the tree, and, having set it on fire, made for cover as fast as they could, but not fast enough to prevent three of their men receiving wounds from which they never recovered.

The Napukans, thoroughly prepared for such an emergency, commenced to pour bowl after bowl of water down the trunk of the tree, and continued until the bark was well saturated, and the fire harmlessly burnt itself out. But the head-hunters, quite ready for such a counterplot, carried another house to the tree and set it on fire, and again they lost a few men by the operation.

This was repeated until seven houses had been consumed, and then the trunk of the tree caught fire, the Napukans' supply of water having become exhausted.

The head-hunters quickly perceived the condition of affairs, and they extended themselves in a circle round

the burning tree, ready to kill every man, woman, and child who escaped death when the tree fell.

But the victory, though it seemed assured to the head-hunters, remained with the Napukans; for Captain Birtle—who had hitherto allowed the fight to proceed without taking any part in it—seeing that his neighbours were likely to be exterminated, in which event the village and the store would inevitably be plundered of every portable article, and his own life would probably be sacrificed, commenced firing among the enemy, many of whom were within a few yards of the palisade.

Every shot told, and man after man fell to rise no more, until a panic seized the head-hunters and they rushed to their canoes, to find, however, that several well-directed stones had been thrown into them from the tree-house, rendering three of them unseaworthy. This occasioned momentary confusion, during which the Napukans were not idle, their arrows flying with deadly effect among the massed forms of the enemy, the trader meanwhile continuing to pick off man after man with disconcerting regularity.

The head-hunters crowded into the serviceable canoes and made for the opening in the reef; but the villagers kept up their steady rain of missiles, and, while some descended and beat out the flames that were slowly creeping up the trunk of the tree, others rushed to their canoes that had been hidden in the bushes and gave chase to the enemy, whose flight was greatly hampered by many of their rowers dropping to the unerring rifle of Captain Birtle.

There was a life-and-death race to the entrance, through which seven of the enemy's canoes succeeded in passing, the others being "cut out" by the Napukans. A hand-to-hand battle ensued, but, though the head-hunters fought with the bravery of despair, they were soon



completely outnumbered, the whole force of the villagers attacking them on all sides.

In Solomon Island warfare surrender is not dreamt of, as those who are defeated and are unable to escape are mercilessly killed or no less mercilessly captured to be reserved for ceremonial torture. This was the fate that overtook the unfortunate trophy-seekers; of the three hundred or more who so fearlessly advanced to the attack, less than half escaped, and many of those probably bore mortal wounds, for the poison in which the arrows were dipped seldom failed to produce tetanus.

The number of Napukans wounded were insignificant, and only three were killed.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### TORTURE AND CANNIBALISM.

THOUGH naturally jubilant at having achieved so signal a victory over their dreaded foes, the Napukans lamented that so few prisoners had been taken, as the ceremony of torturing them was a form of entertainment almost as popular as the cannibal feast that followed.

Elaborate preparations were usually made for the torture, and the victims were often retained for a long time to be available to signalise the completion of a chief's house or the launching of a war canoe. But one of the head-hunters brought ashore after the fight precipitated his fate by attempting to escape. He took an opportunity when his captors momentarily relaxed their vigilance, and slipping his bonds darted off into the jungle. But his escape was observed, and instant pursuit being given he was soon recaptured, and to prevent a second attempt, and as a warning to the other captives, the unfortunate man's feet were hacked off, the stumps being thrust into the fire to stop the flow of blood.

This incident seemed to whet the savages' fiendish appetites, for, without further delay, the captives were brought forward one by one and horribly tortured until they were dead. One was bound to a tree as a target, at which the Napukans aimed their spears and arrows, shouts of approval hailing every shot that took effect elsewhere than in a vital part, while a roar of execration

greeted the marksman so unskilful as to inflict the fatal wound. Another of the prisoners was fastened to a post in the midst of a circle of fire, the miserable wretch being, in fact, slowly roasted to death. Another's hands and feet were tied to stakes driven in the ground and a fire was kindled on his stomach, an earthen pot of water being at the same time kept boiling so that the scalding liquid streamed over his body.

A cord was thrown over the branch of a tree and another victim, suspended by the wrists, was swung backwards and forwards between two groups of islanders armed with keen bamboo knives. As the body approached, one of the natives sprang forward and endeavored to slice off a piece of flesh, and if successful immediately devoured it, the parts most highly appreciated being the tip of the nose, the cheeks, and the ears.

Horrible to relate, it was the women who displayed the most diabolical cruelty. Inhuman and fiendish as were the men, they sometimes released a dying victim from his misery by the merciful stroke of a tomahawk or thrust of a spear; but the women never appeared satisfied unless the poor tortured wretch shrieked in his agony. They emulated each other in devising ferocious torments, and laughed and joked in pitiless glee as the doomed man howled and writhed in his death anguish.

Captain Birtle had intended to prevent the captives being tortured, but he had confidently expected that they would have been kept at least until those slain in the fight had been disposed of—that is, eaten. He was well aware that the Napukans would celebrate their victory by a cannibal feast, which he had no fancy to witness, so he took the opportunity to visit Matuko to arrange with Kerewa for the resumption of the diving operations.

The trader, not having his usual companion, who of course could not be persuaded to absent himself from the

village while the festivities were in prospect, had to handle the paddle himself, consequently the journey took much longer than usual, and, in fact, the Captain did not hasten, because his experience told him there would be very little quiet in Napuka that night. Yet upon his return he was horrified to find the natives in the height of their madness of enjoyment of the torture of the captives, and ravenously eager to commence the cannibal festival.

Almost all the living victims had been tortured to death ; one fine, handsome islander, whose tenacity of life had enabled him to suffer being slowly roasted until his seared and blackened form scarcely resembled anything human, still afforded the gloating women an object for their demoniac ingenuity.

A humane bullet from the trader's rifle soon ended the poor wretch's misery, much to the disgust of the blood-intoxicated natives, whose indignation became redoubled when Captain Birtle claimed the two remaining captives as his share of the spoils.

The natives excitedly resisted the trader's demand, though unable to contest the justice of his claim ; but when it was found that one of the prisoners was mortally wounded, so that he could not live many hours, and that the other was a mere stripling, to torture whom promised indifferent sport, no further objection was raised ; and Captain Birtle conducted the young head-hunter to the store, where, for the time, he was safe from his enemies.

The captives having been disposed of, the bloodthirsty cravings of the natives seemed rather heightened than appeased. Without resting for a moment, the women set about the preparations for the horrible orgies. Large earthen pots were filled with water and placed upon several fires. The water soon boiled, when ladles made of cocoa-nut shells were used to pour it over the bodies of the slain head-hunters, that were then carefully scraped

with bamboo knives. The bodies, as they were prepared, were suspended from the branches of the surrounding trees, and the women beat them with their hands and with sticks, perhaps merely as an additional indignity, but probably for the purpose of rendering the flesh tender.

Ten of the bodies having been thus prepared, an old native, whose duty or prerogative it was to perform the ceremonial portion of the butchery, directed the young men who acted as his assistants to cut down the bodies, and to place them upon large palm-leaf mats in the midst of the assembled tribe. He then, with a sharp knife, dismembered them, the heads being first carefully severed and placed in a conspicuous position before Birara, who, with his wives grouped behind him, sat on the slightly raised platform in front of the ofilau.

The choice pieces were then carefully cut off and delivered in the strictest order of precedence to the different members of the tribe; the less highly appreciated portions being thrown among the outer circle of women, who scarcely had patience to wait until the horrible morsels had been warmed at the fire before they devoured them.

The men proceeded more deliberately, and when the whole of the bodies had been apportioned, the "joints" were carefully wrapped in banana leaves, the trunks being stuffed with bananas and yams, and placed in the native ovens—trenches in the ground—that had already been thoroughly heated, and, when full, each oven was covered with hot stones and ashes.

While the revolting viands were being cooked, the "talking man" of the tribe advanced into the circle, and commencing in a monotonous sing-song, recounted the events of the battle, each allusion to an exploit being hailed with appreciative shouts; the highly embellished narration of the successive achievements of the day

stirring the natives up to the wildest enthusiasm, until the orator had to shriek and bellow to make his voice heard above the tumult.

The oration continued for about two hours, when the ovens were opened and their loathsome contents re-distributed among the assembled warriors, who, without further ceremony, devoured morsel after morsel with the keenest gusto, until the whole had been eaten, when the surfeited islanders dispersed to their houses and slept far into the next day.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### TREACHERY AND PRECAUTIONS.

CAPTAIN BIRTLE lost no time in re-commencing the recovery of the treasure, in which work Tolo, the young head-hunter he had rescued from the torture, proved an able and willing assistant; for the young fellow was a more expert diver than the Napukan, and as Tolo entertained a mortal dread of the villagers there was little risk that he would divulge the trader's secrets.

With two divers available the work would have gone on apace, but unfortunately the monsoon season was upon them; and for nearly two months the wreck was scarcely approachable. Still, advantage was taken of every lull, and the trader's fortune steadily grew, his anxiety for its safety and his own increasing in a sort of geometrical progression, the "common ratio" being the amount of his wealth and the "multiplier" the number of the dangers that surrounded him.

These dangers were unmistakably becoming greater every day, for Miokona's bearing whenever he visited Napuka was most insolent; though the punishment Captain Birtle had inflicted upon the head-hunters had produced a profound respect for his rifle, and this alone kept both Miokona and Birara from openly attacking the trader.

The mountain chief was both bolder and craftier than Birara, and he missed no opportunity of disputing with

Captain Birtle, in the hope that a quarrel would be commenced that would afford a pretext for the trader's murder. But Captain Birtle thoroughly understood the character of the savage he had to deal with, and, while retaining perfect command of his temper, he plainly showed Miokona that he would shoot him down at the first symptom of treachery.

The assigned reason for Birara's disaffection was the trader's interference with the torture of the captive head-hunters; but the actual cause of the Napukan's latent hostility was the belief he entertained that Captain Birtle intended to remove the store to Matuko, a conviction that was strengthened by the frequent journeys the trader made thither and the very friendly relations existing between him and Kerewa. The trader's especial friendship for the chief of Matuko was amply demonstrated, as it seemed to Birara, by the valuable gifts Kerewa continually received, his recent acquisition of a musket having made him the most powerful chief on the island, though he possessed no ammunition, nor did he understand how to use the weapon.

This being the condition of affairs, it is not difficult to understand that Captain Birtle awaited with the greatest anxiety the return of the *Bonito*, though he did not wish the schooner to arrive until he had secured the whole of the treasure.

The monsoon, however, proved much more severe than usual, and though it delayed the arrival of the *Bonito*, it also retarded the recovery of the coins, so that, when at last the schooner appeared, it found Captain Birtle unprepared, a very large portion of the treasure remaining in the coffer upon the wreck.

Any other man than Captain Birtle, probably, would have taken the opportunity to ship the fortune he had acquired and conveyed it safely to Australia; but the



trader's doggedly tenacious disposition forbade him to relinquish any portion of the submerged wealth.

He was surrounded by perils. He was convinced that if the reckless beachcombers who constituted the crew of the *Bonito* gained an inkling of the wonderfully profitable description of trading he had lately been engaged in, they would unhesitatingly murder him and make off with the treasure; if he secretly shipped the money, he would have, in a manner, to mount guard over it until he had landed it safely in Sydney, otherwise he knew he would never hear of it or the *Bonito* again; and if he left Napuka, he was convinced that Kerewa would communicate the secret of the wreck and its valuable cargo to anyone who was placed in charge of the store.

Thus Captain Birtle was placed in an extremely awkward dilemma. To leave the island involved the abandonment of a considerable portion of the treasure, while to remain meant recommencing the unequal struggle against Miokona and Birara, in which the slightest mistake would inevitably result in the islanders murdering him.

But Captain Birtle was not the man to be turned from his purpose by mere danger, however imminent; so, trusting in his knowledge of native character and in the tact that had hitherto been effective in pacifying the most treacherous islanders, he resolved to remain at Napuka until the whole of the treasure had been recovered, and to obtain the means to thoroughly search every portion of the wreck.

Going aboard the schooner, therefore, as soon as she had entered the lagoon, he said to the mate—

"Well, Simmonds, so you've got back."

"Yes, cap'n; an' I'm glad to see they ain't eaten you."

"No; I guess I'm too tough for 'em. What sort of a trip have you had?"

"Oh, pretty fair, cap'n, until we had to beat up agin that confounded monsoon, which was precious slow work."

"Yes, it's bin blowin' pretty constant; but you'll have a fair wind to run back to Mackay."

"To Mackay!" exclaimed Simmonds.

"Yes. I want you to get out of this as soon's you can to go over to Queensland. I've dropped across a pretty rich patch o' pearl shell, an' the natives won't tackle the divin'. 'Fraid o' sharks or some other fish, they say; but the fact is they're too blessed lazy. So I want you to get a divin' dress, pump, an' the rest of it."

"All right, cap'n; but shan't we ship the produce and land the stores?"

"It isn't worth while shipping the produce, but you can let me have some o' the stores."

"I'm rayther doubtful whether we'll get a divin' dress at Mackay, cap'n; the stores there ain't overperved with luxuries."

"Well, if you can't, you must go on down the coast; try at Rockhampton, an' go right to Brisbane, if you can't get hold of one nearer."

"Right you are, cap'n; I'll do the best I can."

"And, Simmonds, bring back with you a few pounds of blasting powder, say six or eight pounds; or you might ask about that new stuff they use for blasting—I forget the name of it."

"Dynamite?" suggested Simmonds.

"Yes, I think that's it. Just ask about it, an' find out how it's used, if you can get any. I've read that it'll burn under water. The openin' in the reef near the pearl shell patch ain't wide enough to take the *Bonito*, an' I was thinkin' of blastin' a bit of it away, as we could work more comfortable off the ship than out o' a boat. A couple o' blasts ought to do it."

Having thus hoodwinked the mate, Captain Birtle

returned ashore, and, while the men were engaged landing the stores, he carried into execution another portion of his plan.

Away in England, at Clifton, a suburb of Bristol, dwelt the trader's only sister. The somewhat fitful correspondence that the brother and sister had kept up while Birtle was at the gold diggings had long ceased; for many years the trader had neither written to nor received a line from his only near relative, though the deep affection that formerly existed between them had never waned. The habit of corresponding, never a confirmed one, had simply been broken, and as is too frequently the case, the two members of the same family were as completely lost to each other as if the grave had closed over one of them.

The trader's migratory habits had prevented the last letters from "home" reaching his hands, so the sister had, most sorrowfully, been constrained to believe that her dear brother had come to an untimely end in the far-off land.

Captain Birtle's thoughts, now that an immense fortune seemed within his very grasp, turned instinctively to the only tie that gave his life an interest beyond his immediate surroundings, and he had resolved that, whatever happened to him, his sister or her child should enjoy the fruits of his success.

He remembered that, when he left England, his sister's firstborn was a fine, handsome boy, and he calculated that the lad, if alive, would be about twenty-two years of age. He therefore wrote the full particulars of his discovery, giving minute directions for finding the grotto in the cave where the treasure was secreted, and enjoining his sister, should she not have heard from him within a year, to despatch her son Mark, or, failing him, some one in whom she could place implicit reliance, to recover the treasure.

He then formally bequeathed to her and her children the whole of his possessions, of which he gave a com-

prehensive statement, two of the sailors being called in to witness his signature, though the trader took care that they learned nothing as to the nature of the document they attested.

An order upon his Sydney agents for an amount amply sufficient to pay for the charter of a small vessel for the voyage to and from the island completed the contents of the packet, which the trader carefully enveloped and fastened in a manner to defeat the most prying investigator, writing upon it the instruction that it was on no account to be opened within a year from the date of its receipt.

The trader then enclosed the packet with an affectionate letter to his sister, containing an account of his adventurous life, and expressing his intention to visit England in the course of a few months, and taking the letter aboard, he gave it to Simmonds, instructing him to be sure to post it as soon as he reached Mackay.

The *Bonito* was immediately towed out through the entrance, and she soon passed out of sight beyond the southern headland, heeling well over to the strong north-westerly breeze, on her way to Queensland.

After the schooner had taken her departure, the captain was pleased to notice a decided change in Birara's disposition towards him. The old chief of Napuka at once resumed the effusively friendly relations that had existed between them prior to the coolness that had latterly sprung up. This the trader attributed to the dispersion of the native's suspicion that the store was about to be removed to Matuko. Birara knew that if the captain had intended to remove the store, he would have done so while the *Bonito* remained, so as to have the use of the ship's boats and the assistance of the crew. Captain Birtle congratulated himself upon the threatened trouble with the islander having been so unexpectedly averted, for

while Birara remained friendly the trader could afford to ignore Miokona's animosity.

Having taken every precaution he could think of against the treasure being lost to his relatives in the event of his death, Captain Birtle applied himself resolutely to the task of recovering the remaining gold pieces, fully expecting to have the work completed long before the *Bonito* returned with the explosive and the diving apparatus, when he intended to blow up and thoroughly explore the wreck.

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## CHAPTER X.

### DAINGEROUS CONFIDENCES.

THE good ship *Morning Light*, eight weeks out from London, bound for Melbourne, was bowling along with all plain sail set, making her easting at the rate of about 250 miles a day, having rounded the Cape nearly a week before. The weather was fine, though the breeze was fresh, and the clipper lay over to her work and cut through the waves in a manner that made every soul aboard her bright and hopeful.

Clustered aft was a group of passengers who merit more than passing attention. Standing with his back against the taffrail was a sturdy young fellow, with fair hair, healthful ruddy complexion, and clear bright blue eyes; his name was Mark Derrison. Beside him lounged his brother Harry, a tall, slim youth, resembling Mark in many respects, but having darker hair, less robust physique, and scarcely so frank an expression.

Opposite them stood Nathaniel Snape, a middle-aged man, of sallow complexion, with iron-grey hair, closely cropped grey beard, small dark eyes, large mouth, and thin lips; a spare, wizened little man he seemed, but endowed with perhaps a superabundance of the quality that in America is denominated "'cuteness."

Sprawling back in a deck-chair lay Joseph Mudge, the remaining member of the group, a tall, gaunt, beardless, overgrown schoolboy-looking man, whose protuberant

goggle eyes, prominent nose, wide mouth, long, pointed chin, and large, projecting ears imparted to him an appearance of perpetual astonishment, which was enhanced by the habitual exclamations of surprise he uttered as he listened to the conversation going on around him. A more perfect specimen of a simpleton, to judge by his appearance, it would have been difficult to discover; but, though he seemed so foolish, and listened open-mouthed to the most extraordinary "yarns" that were told, he displayed a faculty for cross-examination that would have won him a fortune as a barrister. His predominating characteristic was inquisitiveness; he put the most impertinent questions with unhesitating impudence, and persistently followed up a line of inquiry until nothing more could be elicited. Not that he always felt much interest in the subject of his inquiries, but, seemingly, the habit of questioning had been cultivated until it had become almost the only way in which he could take part in a conversation.

"Then you don't intend to stop in Melbourne, when you get there?" said Mudge addressing Mark Derrison.

"No; as soon as we can get our traps ashore we shall go to Sydney," replied Mark.

"B't you'll stop and have a look round Melbourne, won't you?" asked Mudge. "There's plenty to be seen in Melbourne, ain't there, Snape?"

"Oh, yes; Melbourne's a go-ahead place; at least it was when I left there a couple of years ago."

"What did you leave for?" queried Mudge.

"Well, I'd made a bit of a pile, and I thought I'd like to see the old country again. But I couldn't stand it long; everybody I had known seemed to be dead or gone away, so I'm on my way back again."

"How did you make the 'bit of a pile' as you call it?" persisted Mudge.

"Oh, I made it on Bendigo; got into a hole that a fellow had sunk and abandoned as a 'duffer,' and almost the first blow of my pick turned over a big nugget."

"My! but that was lucky," exclaimed Mudge. "Did you get many of 'em?"

"Yes, I just happened to have hit upon a rich 'pocket,' and in about a fortnight I washed out over three thousand pounds' worth of gold.

"And then you thought you'd go home?" said Mudge.

"Yes, I went home; but I'd been away more than ten years, for I'd had lots of bad luck before I had that slice of good."

"I had an uncle who had bad luck at the gold diggings," said Mark. "He went out soon after the gold was first discovered, when I was a little fellow. I can just remember him."

"He ought to have 'made his pile' if he went out in the early days," said Snape.

"Oh, he did very well," returned Mark; "but he had no luck at gold digging."

"What did he make his money at then?" inquired Mudge.

"Trading among the South Sea Islands," replied Mark.

"Trading among the South Sea Islands!" repeated Mudge. "What sort of a game is that?"

"Why, the natives of the islands sell tortoiseshell, cocoa-nuts, and all sorts of things for a few beads or buttons. My uncle used to clear a couple of hundred pounds every voyage, and he made three and sometimes four voyages a year."

"Used to, you say; is your uncle dead then?" said Mudge.

"Yes, I'm afraid he is," replied Mark. "We're going to try to find out what has become of him. He wrote to



mother more than a year ago and nothing has been heard from him since."

"Oh, that's nothing," interjected Snape. "You mustn't think, because you haven't heard from him for a little more than a year, that he must be dead. Why, I usen't to write home once in five years. When you're knocking about the colonies you don't seem to have time to write home."

"That may be so," replied Mark; "but unfortunately my uncle, when his last letter was written, was in great danger; and he said that if we didn't hear from him for a year we should know that he was dead."

"Was he very ill? What was the matter with him?" asked Mudge.

"No, he wasn't ill," answered Mark. "The natives at the place where he lived were very treacherous, and he thought they might kill and eat him."

"My! Eat him! But that's strange!" exclaimed Mudge. "If he could send away a letter, why couldn't he escape himself?"

"He'd have had to sacrifice his fortune if he had come away, so he preferred to run the risk."

"What's the use of your going out then, if you're sure your uncle's dead?" inquired Mudge.

"Oh, we're going to try to find him; and even if we fail, we've got to look after his money. He left that to mother and us."

"But if he couldn't get away with it what chance is there of you ever getting it?" said Mudge. "The natives'll kill you too, and eat you, though they won't have much of a picking off Harry."

"Don't you mind what sort of picking they'll have off me," interposed Harry, evidently not relishing the turn the conversation had taken. "You take care of yourself, and don't go among the islanders, or they'll take you for a

big baby and roast you whole"; and with that as a parting shot Harry walked away forward.

"But what's the use of running into such danger?" persisted Mudge, returning unabashed to the charge. "Very likely the natives have stolen your uncle's money, or goods, or whatever his fortune consisted of, or some one else has probably carried it off by this time."

"My uncle took care to hide it," replied Mark; "and his letter to mother gave directions where it was to be found."

"Oh, that's a horse of a different colour," remarked Snape. "I was beginning to think myself that you two youngsters were on a bit of a wild-goose chase."

"But won't you have a difficult job to find the place?" persisted Mudge.

"There may be some difficulty, but my uncle's directions, that I have in my trunk below, seem very explicit; and he appears to have thought out every detail, even to enclosing a letter to his Sydney agents, Messrs. Bannatyne and Fletcher, who will provide the money to charter a vessel to visit the island on which my uncle lived."

"Well, I'd rather you did the trip than I," remarked Snape. "I shouldn't care to run my head into such a noose. It's doubtful if you'll ever get out of it with your lives."

"Why didn't you send some one, instead of going yourselves?" asked Mudge.

"It's easier to say 'send some one' than to find some one to send. As you can see, the expedition is not such as everyone would care to undertake, and as a considerable amount is at stake—for it must be a considerable amount, though my uncle's letter does not state how much; but he would not have risked his life for a small sum—it would have been difficult to find anyone who could be trusted to recover the money or property. My uncle's letter

suggested that I should be sent—he knew me as a youngster—and as it happened, the firm I was engaged with—Terrill and Co., the sugar refiners—failed, so I had nothing to do, nor any prospect of getting another position, for the sugar trade is going to the dogs. But, as a matter of fact, I am delighted to have to make the trip ; it's such a splendid holiday, and, if we merely recover as much as will pay our expenses, I shall not be altogether dissatisfied, though I expect to return with a genuine fortune."

" Well, I wish you luck," said Snape as they moved off in response to the steward's luncheon bell ; " but I wouldn't change places with you for a very big fortune indeed."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### TWO HONEST YOUTHS.

"I WOULDN'T have told those fellows so much about our business if I'd been you," said Harry to Mark, when they were together in their cabin after luncheon. "You know mother specially cautioned us against letting anyone know what was the object of our voyage to Australia. She has a dread that some one will murder us to obtain the money."

"Oh, those fellows don't matter," responded Mark, though he felt a little uneasy at having been betrayed into saying so much about the nature of the business that was taking them to Australia, and he was glad when he remembered that Harry had left before any really definite revelation had been made.

"There can be no danger with such fellows as those," continued Mark. "Snape scarcely took any notice of what I said, and Mudge is too much of an innocent to be a rogue."

"I tried to give you a hint to stop," said Harry; "and I thought you would have come with me when I went into the fo'c's'le, but you didn't. I hope you didn't say much more."

"Oh, not much," replied Mark; "Snape said he wouldn't take such a trip as ours for a big fortune, and then the bell rang."

"I dare say no harm's done, but it's as well to be

careful; you meet with strange people when you're travelling," observed Harry sententiously. "I wonder whether mother has become reconciled to parting with both of us."

"Poor *mater* opposed the expedition from the first; she would rather have sacrificed the money. You don't remember when Uncle Richard's letter was received; you were away at school," said Mark. "There wasn't much in the letter itself to excite curiosity; but that mysterious packet that was not to be opened for a year caused us much anxious speculation. We made all sorts of guesses, and, but for mother's determination to respect uncle's wishes, I believe I should have yielded to temptation and opened the packet there and then."

"Yes, mother wrote to me about it," observed Harry; "and I made a note of the date, otherwise you'd have both forgotten all about it."

"The packet was locked away in father's old bureau, and, what with the disturbance of our settled habits by your return from school, and then the failure of Terrill & Co., and my consequent loss of employment, mother and I forgot all about it; but you, methodical old chap, your everlasting diary kept it from being quite forgotten. It was exactly the anniversary of the date the letter was received when the packet was opened. It sounds like a bit out of the 'Arabian Nights.' Didn't you expect something extraordinary to happen after waiting so religiously until the year had elapsed?"

"Well, I hardly know what I expected," responded the matter-of-fact Harry; "I had thought of a good many explanations of the mystery, but none of them much resembled the actual state of affairs."

"Poor *mater* was terribly grieved to think that her only brother had died a violent death, for she imagines because he wrote about one of his storekeepers being killed and

eaten by the natives, that uncle must have suffered a similar fate. She didn't attach much importance to the particulars about the recovered treasure; and I really believe if I had still been employed at Terrill & Co.'s she would have refused to let me go."

"Yes, ever since father died," said Harry, "mother seems to have entertained a presentiment that something would happen to us and that she would be left widowed and childless. She believed her brother to be dead then, and she was overjoyed when the letter came from him; but now her despondency is as great as ever."

"You have never told me how you persuaded mother to let you accompany me," said Mark.

"You won't feel flattered if I tell you," replied Harry smiling.

"Oh, never mind flattery. How did you manage it?"

"Well," said Harry, "I reminded mother of your impetuously enthusiastic disposition, that so often causes you to outrun discretion; of your unsuspecting trustfulness, that leads you to believe everyone else to be as straightforward and honest as yourself; and of your eager heedlessness and want of forethought, that on such an errand as we have undertaken would seriously imperil your chances of success, if not absolutely wreck them."

"You certainly sketched me with a pretty bold outline as a headstrong noodle," interjected Mark good-humouredly.

"You dear old boy! You know I merely exercised the caricaturist's licence, and exaggerated the prominent features of your frank, generous character."

"Then, I suppose," retorted Mark smilingly, "you depicted yourself as a model of discretion, a perfect wonder of circumspection, a sort of Cerberus, Argus, and London detective rolled into one; a prudent manager, and, in short, the very converse of your hot-headed brother, whose rashness you promised to check, and whose

enthusiasm you undertook to guide—or, peradventure, extinguish.”

“Yes; I must confess that was about the line I took; and mother was at last induced to acknowledge the cogency of my arguments; and the dear old lady finally gave in and allowed me to accompany you.”

“And I’m heartily glad of it,” said Mark placing his hand affectionately upon his brother’s shoulder; “for already I have discovered that your foresight and method have smoothed many difficulties, and I hope your watchfulness and caution will steer us clear of all dangers.”

The contrasting characteristics of the two young men may be very easily explained. The elder was twenty-three years of age, and up to the death of his father, which took place when Mark was eighteen, it had been intended that he should go to Oxford and afterwards enter one of the professions; but when his father’s affairs came to be investigated it was found that, beyond a modest annuity that had been very prudently secured to Mrs. Derrison, little remained—neither sufficient to carry out the intentions as to Mark’s career nor to enable him to enter any business firm with even an infinitesimal share. Reluctantly, therefore, the high-spirited Mark had been obliged to accept a desk in the office of Mr. Terrill, an intimate friend of his father, and there he had remained until declining trade had brought about a crisis such as would assuredly have overtaken the elder Mr. Derrison had he long survived.

Harry, on the other hand, was only fourteen when his father died, and the succeeding five years had served to develop and form his character. He had received an ordinary public school education; but the knowledge that he would be obliged to fight his way in the world had thus early matured and hardened his nature, so that, though his brother was five years his senior, the younger

was the more worldly wise. He had none of the amiable weaknesses exhibited by Mark; he did not implicitly believe that all men were truthful and honest; he could perceive that the purest motives did not actuate everyone with whom he came in contact. Yet Harry was a brave, honest young fellow; he despised falsehood and trickery, and though sometimes disposed to be angry on account of Mark's good-natured credulity and easy-going complaisance, he deeply loved him and ardently admired the noble traits of self-forgetfulness and earnestness Mark so consistently displayed.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### A SERIOUS LOSS.

EARLY one morning the welcome cry "Land ho!" resounded through the ship, and soon Cape Otway was passed. A steady south-westerly breeze carried the *Morning Light* smartly through the Port Phillip Heads, and by the following night the ship was snugly berthed in Hobson's Bay.

Mark and Harry went ashore early next morning to make enquiries as to the speediest means of proceeding to Sydney, and they were informed that a steamer that had passed them half-way down the bay had been bound thither, and that no other would start for four days. Much against their will, therefore, the brothers had to take up their quarters ashore; so, to be as near as possible to the wharf, they put up at the Pier Hotel, Sandridge.

Accustomed to English hotels, it never occurred to them to take the precaution to inspect the room assigned them; so that when they retired for the night they were surprised to be shown to a room containing four beds, and by-and-bye their room-mates put in an appearance and proved to be their late fellow passengers, Snape and Mudge.

Congratulating themselves upon not having absolute strangers billeted with them—though Mudge, under the guidance of Snape, had evidently been rather freely tasting the wares dispensed in the Melbourne hotels—they

slept as well as the myriads of mosquitoes would allow them, and in the morning sallied forth, bent on seeing the sights of the much-vaunted Melbourne—"the Queen City of the South."

The three days at their disposal were thus pleasantly employed and most of the places of interest in the Victorian capital were visited.

When, however, the time arrived for the steamer *Wonga-wonga* to start for Sydney, they were annoyed to find that her departure had been postponed for three days, in consequence of the *Black Swan*, belonging to a rival company, having at short notice been placed on the Sydney berth, and, having started a few hours earlier, had monopolised the passengers and cargo that would otherwise have gone by the *Wonga-wonga*.

While blaming themselves for having neglected to more accurately ascertain the movements of the steamers, they contentedly resumed the extremely innocent form of dissipation in which they had indulged since landing from the *Morning Light*, little dreaming that the most serious consequences were to follow from this seemingly insignificant mischance.

"Snape's off," announced Mudge, when the brothers returned to the hotel in the evening.

"Off what?" inquired Mark.

"Off—gone—cleared out—hooked it," explained Mudge.

"What! gone away! Where to?" Mark asked in astonishment.

"Don't know. The landlord says he thinks he's gone to Adelaide; the *Penola* sailed this morning."

"Why, he was always praising Melbourne," said Mark; "and he repeatedly advised us to settle here, as he said he intended to do. He might have had the politeness to say 'Good-bye,' anyhow."

The young men thought no more of the circumstance

until they retired for the night, when it was discovered that Mark's sea-chest had been removed from beside his bed.

The landlord was called, but he could offer no explanation of the mystery.

"Mr. Snape," he said, "left soon after you gentlemen went out this morning. He paid his bill, called a dray, had his chest brought down, and went off towards the pier. Perhaps Billy will be able to throw some light on the matter; he carried down the chest."

Billy, the general handy-man of the hotel, was accordingly sent for.

"Yes; a little grey chap told me to carry down his box from number 'leven," stated Billy. "He pointed out a big green box standin' there under the winder."

"Why, that was my box," exclaimed Mark.

"Well, mate," said Billy; "the little grey feller told me to carry it down, so I s'posed 'twas his'n. 'Twas main hefty, an' I was glad enough when I got it on the dray; an' the stingey little feller on'y gev me a tanner."

"Are you sure you only carried one box down?" asked Mark.

"Quite sure, guv'nor," replied Billy; "an' I wouldn't a carried that one down if I'd thought he'd gev me less'n a bob."

"Perhaps you're mistaken after all, Mr. Derrison," said the landlord; "there are three boxes in the room now. Is either of them yours?"

"No," replied Mark. "That's Harry's."

"And here's mine," said Mudge.

"Then whose is that?" inquired the landlord, pointing to a large box in the corner of the room; and, taking the candle across to the place, he read painted on the lid "Nathanial Snape, passenger per *Morning Light*, for Melbourne. Wanted on the voyage."

"Why, Mr. Snape has made a mistake in the boxes—or else you did, Bill," he said turning to the man.

"No fear, boss. The little grey feller came up wi' me, an' pointed out the box under the winder, and hurried me up as if he meant to give me half a bull, confound him."

"There's been a mistake somewhere, Mr. Derrison," said the landlord. "Mr. Snape could not have purposely taken your box and left his own."

"No, I don't see why he should," replied Mark.

"Was there anything of much value in your box, Mr. Derrison?" inquired the landlord.

"No; nothing of especial value to anyone except myself; but I shall be seriously inconvenienced for the want of many things it contains."

"Well, I expect Mr. Snape will soon discover his blunder, and be only too glad to exchange your box for his own," observed the landlord. "It will be advisable for you to wait for a few days until the *Penola* returns from Adelaide; very likely he'll send your box back and ask you to forward his."

"Yes," said Mark dubiously; "perhaps he will. I hope he will."

"In the meantime, I'll take charge of Mr. Snape's box," said the landlord. "I'll put it into the store-room, where it will be quite safe. Catch hold of it, Bill, and carry it into the store-room."

"All right, boss," replied Billy; but when he attempted to lift the chest he found he could not move it.

"My word!" he said; "I'm glad the little chap didn't want this un carried down. I can't budge it. Give us a hand, boss."

The landlord went to Billy's assistance, and they tugged with might and main at the rope handles, but could not lift the chest from the floor.

"There must be somethin' mighty hefty in it," said Billy. "Guess we'll have to empt' it afore it goes down them stairs."

Mark and Mudge went to the assistance of the landlord and Billy, and by their united efforts the chest left the floor with a crash, the sides coming away entire, but leaving the bottom on the floor, exposing only a few articles of clothing and half-a-dozen novels.

"Well I'm blowed!" exclaimed Billy; "if that don't just beat creation!"

"Whatever made the box so heavy?" queried the landlord. "There isn't a stone weight in all that rubbish."

Mark was dumb with surprise.

"Let me have a look," said Harry, now for the first time interposing; and stooping down he carefully examined the bottom of Snape's box.

"I thought as much," he exclaimed bitterly. "The fellow has, without a doubt, stolen Mark's box. Look here, he's screwed his box to the floor, hoping to deceive us into believing that it was full of goods, and to delay pursuit until he had got clear away."

And so it proved. Snape had driven four large screws through the bottom of the box and a couple of inches into the floor, so that it is not surprising that neither Billy singly, nor Billy and the landlord together, could move it.

"What is to be done?" inquired Mark indignantly. "We must inform the police."

"Yes, I suppose you must," said the landlord; "but I'd rather pay you the value of your goods than have the police informed of a robbery having been committed in my house."

"That's all very well," replied Harry; "but money cannot replace uncle's letter or that order on his Sydney agents. We must put the police on Mr. Snape's track,

and we ought to catch him, for he did not expect to be pursued quite so promptly."

"I thought you said, Mr. Derrison, that there was nothing very valuable in your box," said the landlord.

"I'd quite forgotten the papers until Harry mentioned them," replied Mark. "If we cannot recover them our journey to Australia will be fruitless."

"Are you sure the villain's gone to Adelaide?" asked Harry.

"He told me so himself, when he paid his bill," replied the landlord. "He asked me to have a nobbler, and in the course of conversation he said he had just received a letter from a cousin, who is keeping a store at Mount Gambier, asking him to go there to take charge of it for him."

"That settles it," exclaimed Harry decisively. "That's another part of his plot to throw us off the scent. He's gone in another direction altogether. How could his cousin know of his arrival within four days? And how could he have received a letter from South Australia, when no steamer, as far as I am aware, has arrived from Adelaide since we landed."

"That's true," said the landlord; "I never thought of that. But what could have induced him to steal your box, Mr. Derrison, and to leave the other? The other boxes are all right, I hope."

Harry and Mudge examined their chests and found that nothing in them had been disturbed.

"Those papers of yours wouldn't be of any use to him, would they?" inquired the landlord.

"No," replied Mark; "I can't imagine what induced him to steal my box."

"Well," said Harry; "if he hasn't gone to Adelaide—and of that I feel certain—where has he gone? What other vessels left the bay to-day?"

"I don't think many vessels got away," responded the landlord; "but the harbour-master's down stairs, and he'll be able to tell us."

So down stairs they proceeded, and the harbour-master corroborated the landlord's opinion that very few vessels had cleared out.

"Only the *Black Swan* for Sydney and the *Penola* for Adelaide sailed to-day; the wind was unfavourable for sailing vessels."

"Then he must have gone to Sydney," said Harry.

"Unless he's hidden himself in Melbourne," suggested the landlord.

As the night was far advanced, it was hopeless to attempt to discover any traces of Snape's movements till the morning; but Harry insisted upon the robbery being reported to the police, which was accordingly done, and the brothers then retired to bed, but, it is almost needless to say, not to sleep.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT.

"I'M afraid, Mark," said Harry, as soon as Mudge's snores resounded through the room, "that your incautious confidences aboard are bearing fruit."

"What! You don't mean to say you think Snape has stolen my box to get hold of Uncle Richard's letter?"

"That is what I do fear," replied Harry. "But how he guessed it was in your box I cannot make out. You didn't tell him anything more, did you?"

"No, Harry; after your warning I never approached the subject," responded Mark, uneasily remembering the extent of the revelation he had made.

"Well, I believe the whole thing is a deeply-laid scheme of Snape's. He followed us to this hotel in the hope of having an opportunity of stealing the papers; and if he hadn't got them here he'd have shadowed us to Sydney."

"It's well for us we did as you suggested, Harry, and carried our money in our pockets. That rascal would have been a hundred and sixty pounds richer if we hadn't done so, whereas now he won't get much for his pains," said Mark hopefully. "We can telegraph in the morning to Messrs. Bannatyne & Fletcher and instruct them not to cash uncle's order, and I feel sure I can remember enough of the letter to enable us to find the island and the money, even if we never get the papers back again. But I hope we shall be able to track down that treacherous thief."



"We must lose no time in the morning," said Harry in a despondent tone, and then the brothers tried to sleep.

Their anxiety, however, was too great, and as soon as daylight appeared they dressed and waited impatiently for the telegraph office to be opened, whiling away the time by making inquiries along the pier that elicited information convincing them that Snape had sailed in the *Black Swan*.

On the stroke of eight they presented themselves at the telegraph office and carefully drafted a message to Messrs. Bannatyne & Fletcher informing them of the robbery and instructing them to have anyone attempting to cash Mr. Birtle's order arrested and detained until his nephews could reach Sydney.

A serious obstacle, however, baulked them when the telegram was handed to the clerk.

"Sorry, sir," he said; "line's interrupted. Bush fire destroyed nearly two miles of posts. Hope to have communication restored in the course of the day."

"By Jove! Harry, this is serious," exclaimed Mark, becoming pale with consternation; "he'll escape after all."

"He wont if I can help it," said Harry resolutely; "I'll track the villain as long as I've a breath left in my body."

The remainder of the day was spent in alternate visits to the police station and the telegraph office; but the accident that had disconcerted the brothers had also rendered the police authorities powerless, and until the telegraph line was repaired nothing could be done.

But the day passed, and another followed, and still telegraphic communication with Sydney had not been restored.

Chafing at their impotent inactivity, Mark and Harry passed the time until the *Wonga-wonga* sailed, when they

departed, leaving imperative instructions that their message should be despatched immediately the line became clear, although they entertained but slight hopes that it would arrive in time to secure the arrest of the thief.

In these days of forced draft and nineteen-knot boats the *Wonga-wonga* would undoubtedly be voted a "slow old tub"; but, as a matter of fact, she was a very favourable specimen of an inter-colonial steamer of the period, though perhaps even that description does not recall any visions of epicurean comfort and swift motion to those who experienced the trip between Melbourne and Sydney before the rivalry between the existing steam navigation companies sprang up.

The voyage was, to two of her passengers at any rate, almost intolerably slow. Why the old *Morning Light* often made better runs than the *Wonga-wonga* achieved on this trip. Certainly the wind was dead in her teeth and the sea was very rough, so that three days elapsed before the entrance to Port Jackson was sighted, and then a heavy squall came up, against which the *Wonga-wonga* had to turn tail and run out to sea. However, early on the fourth day, the good old boat steamed bravely through the frowning heads, and in half-an-hour was securely berthed at Circular Quay.

Mark and Harry lost no time in calling at Messrs. Bannatyne & Fletcher's office in Hunter Street, but their worst fears were realised when they were told that a man corresponding in appearance to Snape had, four days previously, produced Mr. Birtle's order and obtained the full amount, five hundred pounds, though Mr. Fletcher had suggested that the whole of the sum would not be required for the purpose mentioned in Mr. Birtle's letter of advice.

The warning telegram had not come to hand until the day after the money had been paid and, notwithstanding

that immediate steps were taken to trace the man who had cashed the order, he could not be found.

"Do you mean to say," asked Mr. Fletcher suspiciously, "that you were robbed of the papers?"

"Yes," replied Mark; "the villain learned something of our business through an incautious conversation I had with him on board the ship we came out in, and he followed us about until an opportunity occurred to carry off the papers."

"Why, he told me that Mrs. Derrison would not consent to her sons risking their lives, and that she had arranged with him to proceed to the islands to recover the treasure. It seems, however, that I have been deceived. I'm sorry I cannot give you any reassuring news about the fate of Captain Birtle," continued Mr. Fletcher. "The *Bonito* returned to Sydney about four months ago from her usual trip round the islands, and Simmonds reported that he had again failed to learn anything definite about his captain. The natives at Napuka, in the Solomon Islands, assert that he suddenly and unaccountably disappeared, and they disclaim all knowledge of what has befallen him. Simmonds believes the islanders have murdered and eaten him, as they did the former agent at the same place; but the chief of the village persistently denies having done so. In accordance with Captain Birtle's instructions, in the event of anything happening to him, the trade is being carried on just as before. The captain seems to have anticipated meeting with a tragic fate, and he evidently intended that his sister's son—for he only mentioned one nephew in his letter to me—should benefit by his exertions in case he did not live to enjoy his wealth."

Harry particularly noticed the suspicious manner in which Mr. Fletcher regarded first one and then the other

of them when he said that Captain Birtle had mentioned only one nephew.

"I was a baby when my uncle came to Australia," he hastened to explain, "and I daresay he quite forgot my existence."

"Well, young men," said Mr. Fletcher; "I should strongly advise you to lose no time in sending to England for proofs of your identity; for until they arrive I shall be obliged to treat you as strangers, or at any rate as having no legal claim to Captain Birtle's property."

"What is to be done?" inquired the practical Harry. "You can surely assist us to expose this fraud, can't you, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Oh, yes; I shall be quite ready to afford you any assistance in my power; but you must remember that Mr. Snape has quite four days' start of you, and I am afraid if he is the rascal you represent he will have effectively disappeared by this time."

"But surely there will be little difficulty in tracing him," objected Mark; "Australia is not such a thickly populated country that a man may conceal his existence as he can in London. Snape's plan must be to charter a vessel to visit the islands to secure the treasure, and if the police are warned at the few ports where he is likely to arrange for such a voyage, they should have no trouble to detect him."

"That's very true," responded Mr. Fletcher; "but you forget that you have nothing to prove your identity. No one in the colonies knows you, and though I believe what you have told me, it is doubtful whether the police authorities would as readily accept your representations."

This view of the situation had never presented itself to the brothers, and they were startled when it was put forward.

"Besides," continued Mr. Fletcher, "do you think it

would be wise to acquaint the police with the existence of the treasure? It would make them alert enough, no doubt, in catching Snape, but it would be folly to expect that they would observe secrecy as to the locality where such a fortune awaits any bold adventurer. They would certainly avail themselves of the information, or they would sell it to others."

"I quite agree with what you say, Mr. Fletcher," said Mark dejectedly; "we must not apply to the police; but what would you advise us to do then?"

"You must make cautious inquiries wherever you think it likely that Snape will try to charter a vessel. I will undertake that no vessel with Mr. Snape aboard shall leave Sydney for the islands without my knowledge, and I think I can arrange for our agents in Melbourne to act in a similar manner at that port. You must go to Brisbane, and, if necessary, your brother must go on to Maryborough, Rockhampton, or Mackay. I will furnish you with letters of introduction to business men who will be able to help you in all those places."

"Cannot we discover whether Snape has already left Sydney?"

"You may, of course, inquire at the offices of the Melbourne and Sydney steamers, but I'm afraid you won't learn much. The booking clerks see too many people to take much notice of any one in particular."

So the brothers thanked Mr. Fletcher and set off somewhat hopelessly on their quest, promising to call again before leaving for Queensland to ascertain whether any news had been obtained of the thief.

Their first visit was paid to the booking office of the Brisbane steamers, and they were encouraged when they learnt that for over a week the boisterous weather had prevented any boat departing for the north. No one answering the description of Snape had booked, and they

promised the clerk a liberal reward if he advised Messrs. Bannatyne & Fletcher when such a man presented himself. As there was a steamer leaving for Queensland that night they took tickets for Brisbane.

The result of their inquiries at the Melbourne steamer offices was not quite so satisfactory. The weather had been favourable for boats bound southward, and three had left within the last four days, by any of which, so far as they could discover, Snape might have taken his passage. No definite information, however, could be gleaned, so the brothers had to content themselves with making arrangements for Messrs. Bannatyne & Fletcher being warned if anyone resembling Snape booked for Melbourne, and, having called at Hunter Street to acquaint Mr. Fletcher with the want of success that had attended their amateur detective efforts, and to arrange for proofs of their identity being obtained from England, they went aboard the *Southern Cross*, which was advertised to start for Brisbane at eleven that night.

They kept a vigilant watch until the steamer cast off from the wharf, in the vain hope that Snape would proceed by the same boat, but he did not put in an appearance.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### A DOUBTFUL OPPORTUNITY.

THE *Southern Cross* made a smart run up the coast, merely calling at Newcastle to fill up her bunkers, and late on Sunday afternoon she steamed up the noble Brisbane River, and Mark and Harry stepped ashore at the Queensland metropolis.

They secured a room at an hotel close to the wharf, and early on Monday commenced making inquiries among the nondescript characters usually encountered at the water-side. For several days, however, their search went on without eliciting anything to the purpose.

"Vessels bound for the islands? My word! you've come to the right place to find 'em, just," replied one seafaring-looking man to whom they had addressed themselves.

"Want to ship, youngsters?" he inquired, looking keenly at Mark's strongly-built figure, and with scarcely less satisfaction at Harry's lithe limbs. "Good chance of a nice trip, if you've a fancy to go afloat."

"No," replied Mark; "we're looking for a friend who is going to the islands, though we don't know by what vessel."

"What's his name?" asked the sailor.

"We are not sure that he will give his own name," replied Mark; "he's a short, thin man, with grey hair and whiskers; face very sallow and wrinkled."

"Ah, there's many a man goes to the islands don't care to sail under his own name. 'Spect he's a bit of a shady customer, isn't he? no offence meant, boys, we gets plenty on 'em up this way; but I haven't seen such a chap as you mention."

"Have many boats left recently for the islands?" inquired Harry.

"No, I can't say as how there've bin a many get away—the wind's bin contra-ary like; but there's three ready to sail, an' I'll be ready by We'n'sday, I hope."

"Where are you bound for?" asked Mark.

"Well, I'll tell you; I'm on a sort of a roundabout trip this time. First we'll run over to the Hebrides, callin' at Vate, Api, Ambrym, Mallicolo, an' Mota, an' p'r'aps one or two other places; then norward to the Santa Cruzes, and arterwards westard round about the Solomons. By that time I hopes we'll be a full ship an' have a fair wind for Mackay, where we'll be in less'n four months."

"How many days' run is it from the Solomons to Mackay?" inquired Harry.

"That just depends, young 'un. If we gets a steady trade wind, we runs over in twelve or fifteen days; but it's precious dry work doin' so much talkin'."

A hint so significant could not be disregarded, so Mark invited the sailor to step into a neighbouring bar and "have a nobbler."

"How long would it take to sail from Brisbane to the Solomons and back?" asked Harry, returning to the charge.

"As I said afore, young 'un, that depends. Might be a month, might be six weeks. If you've got to beat agin the monsoon there's no tellin' how long you'll be."

"What's the trip there and back worth?" inquired Harry.

"Worth?" the sailor repeated, interrogatively.



"Yes; how much do you make by such a voyage?" asked Harry.

"As I said afore, young 'un, that depends. Sometimes we makes a good trip, an' sometimes a bad 'un."

"But taking one voyage with another, what is a trip worth?"

"Worth? Takin' one voyage wi' another? Let's see. A good un's four hunderd poun' an' a bad un's nothin'."

"It's to be hoped that you don't have many bad ones then," said Mark smilingly.

"No, youngster, not a many; nor yet a many good un's either. Takin' 'em all roun', a trip fetches some's about two hunderd poun'. We reckon to do three trips a year, an' to make some's about six hunderd poun'."

"An' you haven't a fancy to do a run roun' the islands, youngsters?" persisted the sailor. "Splendid weather, good boat, enjoy yerselves prime. Just got room for the two of you."

"No, thank you," said Mark. "We must remain here on the look-out for our friend."

"Well, boys, if y' happen to change yer minds afore We'n'sday night, just ask along the wharf for Simon Pugsley. I'd like you to ship along o' me. I'd show you a little life. The wages ain't 'igh, but the work ain't 'ard."

"Very well, Mr. Pugsley," replied Mark; "if we change our minds we will let you know," and with a hearty shake of the hand the sailor departed.

"I've an idea, Mark," said Harry as the brothers strolled down Queen Street.

"You generally have, Harry. What is it?"

"You heard Pugsley say that his trips averaged about two hundred pounds. Well, I've been thinking that we might get Mr. Fletcher to advance us, say, a hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds to enable us to charter

Pugsley's vessel. Pugsley would gladly do the trip to and from the Solomons for two hundred and fifty pounds, as it would not occupy more than two months, whilst his usual run round the islands takes twice that time."

"That's not at all a bad idea, Harry. We'll act upon it at once."

They accordingly found their way to the telegraph office, and sent a message to Mr. Fletcher, requesting him to advance them two hundred pounds, on the understanding that it should be repaid out of the recovered treasure.

They had not to remain long in suspense, for the reply came to hand within an hour. It was business-like and to the point, emphatically declining the brothers' proposal, on the ground that the risk was too great—or, as the telegram tersely objected, it was "doubtful whether money still recoverable."

Mark was extremely incensed. "The suspicious fellow!" he exclaimed. "As if we wouldn't have repaid every farthing, whether we recovered Uncle Richard's money or not!"

But Harry took a more sensible view of the situation. "Mr. Fletcher is right," he said; "there are many chances against the success of our expedition. We mustn't forget that we don't know whether Snape is not already on his way to the islands better equipped than we would be to find the secreted treasure, for he has uncle's directions; and who knows how many beachcombers have visited the spot since uncle wrote to mother, any one of whom may have sprung uncle's plant."

"Uncle seems to have been too cautious a man to have hidden the money where there is a chance of it being accidentally found," rejoined Mark.

"At any rate, we mustn't blame Mr. Fletcher for not meeting our wishes," resumed Harry. "As he said, we've

nothing to prove our identity, and, all things considered, I think he has acted very considerably towards us. Why should he implicitly trust a couple of entire strangers, who have only their words to give as security for a considerable advance?"

"But what are we to do?" inquired Mark impatiently. "We can't go on kicking our heels here, waiting for Snape to run into our arms. The little thief is too cunning to fall into such a trap."

"What do you say to accepting Pugsley's offer?" asked Harry. "We could get to the Solomons that way, and trust to the chapter of accidents to help us to find Uncle Richard's station and his treasure."

"Let us take time to think over it," replied Mark; "we need not decide till Wednesday."

The chapter of accidents invoked by Harry conferred a substantial favour upon the brothers in the course of the following day; for while they pursued their inquiries along the wharves and among the frequenters of the waterside, they fell in with a man who said he had sailed with Captain Birtle, and who stated that he knew the situation of the whole of their uncle's stations throughout the islands, having visited them repeatedly in the *Bonito*.

He told them that Napuka, where Captain Birtle had last been seen alive, was out of the usual track of trading vessels, and that to get there it would be necessary for them to specially charter a small vessel.

"Blackbirders sometimes call there," stated Bob Pilingler, as the man was named. "Birara, the chief, is too knowin' to let any of his fellers recruit; but sometimes he's a few prisoners to sell."

"Why, that's regular slave trading!" exclaimed Mark. "Is that what is called 'blackbirding'? I've frequently heard the expression since we came here; but I didn't understand exactly what it meant."

"Oh, yes," replied Pillinger. "You see, they wants labour for the sugar plantations. The whites can't stand the climate, so they gets the niggers from the islands."

"But I thought it had been put a stop to?" said Mark interrogatively.

"There's been a deal o' talk about stoppin' it, but it goes on all the same," replied Pillinger. "Just look out there," he said, pointing over towards Kangaroo Point; "yer see that smartish little schooner; well, she's the *Polly Hopkins*; starts on a blackbirding trip—recruitin' labour they calls it—to-morrer night, and somehow or another Simon Pugsley gene'llly manages to git back pretty full."

"Pugsley! Why, that's the name of the man we were speaking to yesterday," exclaimed Harry.

"An' not at all a bad feller either," said Pillinger. "I've shipped with him this trip."

"Will the *Polly Hopkins* call at Napuka, do you think?" asked Harry.

"Really can't say," replied Pillinger. "I know she's goin' to the Solomons, if she don't fill up at the Hebrides or the Santa Cruzes; an', between you an' me, she isn't likely to; there's bin too much kidnappin' thereaway lately."

This information increased the brothers' perplexity. They had been under the impression that Pugsley was a trader like their uncle, who made periodical trips to the islands to purchase produce from the natives, which he afterwards sold in Australia. They ardently wished to avail themselves of perhaps the only opportunity that would fall in their way to get to the Solomon Islands, but they had never contemplated taking service on board a slave ship, for, blink the matter how they would, the fact remained that the business of the vessel was to obtain and convey the islanders to Queensland to become the slaves of the sugar planters.

They discussed the subject in all its bearings until the night was far advanced without being able to arrive at any decision, and the morning light brought with it no solution of their difficulty.

At last Harry suggested that another interview with Pugsley would perhaps remove some of their scruples. Accordingly they proceeded to the wharf and soon encountered the captain of the *Polly Hopkins*, who was busily engaged superintending the shipping of the belongings of about thirty South Sea Islanders, whose gleeful chatter and boisterous laughter dispelled many of the gloomy thoughts the brothers had lately been entertaining in connection with the labour traffic.

"Surely," said Harry, "if these are slaves, they are very cheerful and contented. I'll ask Captain Pugsley to explain matters to us."

"Good morning, Captain Pugsley," said Harry.

"Hello, youngsters; you're all alive, I see," was Pugsley's greeting as he turned to see who had addressed him.

"What's the meaning of all this row?" inquired Harry. "What are all the islanders so jolly about?"

"Oh, I'm puttin' 'em aboard to take 'em back to the islands," replied Pugsley.

"How's that? Aren't they slaves?" asked Henry.

"Slaves! Well, that's good! Slaves! There's no slaves under the Union Jack, boy. Her mos' grashus Majesty wouldn't stand slavery in any corner of her glorious empire," exclaimed Pugsley as he turned away, looking as though he scarcely knew whether to be angry or to laugh at the youngster's ignorance.

"Well perhaps, Captain Pugsley," said Harry, "when you have a moment to spare you'll tell us a little about the labour traffic. If we were sure the accounts of atrocities that have been published in the papers were exaggerated we should like to ship with you this trip."

"Oh, that's yer talk, is it, boys?" quickly returned Pugsley; "well, I'll soon hev the last o' these yer boxes aboard, an' then, if you like, I'll jine you at the pub."

"All right, captain; come up and have dinner with us," said Mark, and having received a nod of assent from Pugsley the brothers stood watching the proceedings of the islanders.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### RETURNING ISLANDERS.

ACCORDING to the enactments of the Queensland Parliament, the agreements under which the South Sea Islanders are recruited are limited to three years, and the natives who were so noisily chattering alongside the *Polly Hopkins* were time-expired labourers, who were almost deliriously joyful at the prospect of soon returning to their homes.

Each native possessed a large box—"bokkus," he called it—in which were packed the goods he had acquired during his sojourn in Australia, and those he had purchased with his wages, amounting to £18 for the three years.

A curious collection of articles truly each of those boxes contained. Almost every man had secured a grindstone, which is also a fashionable possession with the islanders, as it enables its owner to make many things from stones, shells, and bones that without its aid would be difficult to manufacture, if not impracticable. An iron camp oven or fish kettle was in nearly every box, and in it were a collection of nails of all sorts and sizes, scraps of iron, and all manner of odds and ends that the islander's acquisitiveness had induced him to find, beg, borrow, or steal, and which he had carefully accumulated during his period of servitude. Then there was an assortment of gaudily coloured garments—shirts, handkerchiefs, ribbons, and hats. Next came a few pounds of tobacco in sticks, packets of buttons—bright brass ones being the favourite description, though

brilliantly coloured and mother-o'-pearl sorts had also their admirers—parcels of beads of different colours and sizes, jew's-harps, mouth-organs, and an extraordinary collection of every description of rubbish, while room was found for many-bladed knives of wonderful construction, axes, hammers, files, and a most miscellaneous assortment of things for which one would have thought these simple islanders could have found no possible use.

It is not surprising that the arrival in town of a number of returning labourers was an event of especial interest to the storekeepers, who spared no pains to attract their custom and who persuaded them to buy all sorts of worthless things; but who at last became so notorious for taking outrageously unfair advantage of the islanders' ignorance of the value of the goods that the Queensland Government was induced to direct an official to accompany the labourers while they laid out their three years' earnings, to prevent them being too scandalously cheated. This expedient secured to the poor islanders in return for their weary years of labour some few things that they coveted; but some of these officials are said to have introduced the commission system, by which they participated with the storekeepers in plundering the natives. The goods, too, were of a grossly inferior quality, specially imported for the purpose of deceiving the islanders, the blades of the knives being mere iron and the axes of an equally fraudulent description, while the articles of clothing were flimsy as to material and make.

Still, under the new order of things, the labourers sometimes found themselves with money in hand even after they had satisfied every wish of their hearts, and then they were at their wits' end to know what to do with the useless coins, and they often purchased the most extraordinary articles to get rid of their surplus money. Thus Mark and Harry noticed that several of the islanders had



gaudily coloured parasols, under which they strutted about or sat in lordly dignity upon their precious "bokkus." Others had become the possessors of a dog or cat, but whether as pets or merely as a change of diet from their customary pork is doubtful.

By degrees the islanders were safely installed on board the *Polly Hopkins* with the whole of their possessions, and Mark and Harry expected the turmoil to cease. But, on the contrary, every islander at once proceeded to re-inspect the contents of his "bokkus" and to barter with his companions, the traffic being accompanied by the most heated arguments as to the value and quality of the goods proposed to be exchanged. No transaction was completed until both parties to it had apparently worked themselves up to such a pitch of excitement that it seemed impossible to avoid bloodshed; but they gradually cooled down, and then the bargain was concluded.

This sort of thing went on and on, the wrangling never ceasing for a moment, an article just acquired being immediately offered in exchange for something else, the smarter traders gradually increasing their possessions at the expense of their less clever comrades.

Leaving the islanders in the midst of their noisy traffic the brothers returned to their hotel, where they were soon joined by Captain Pugsley.

"So you've made up your mind to go along a me," commenced the captain.

"Well not exactly decided," replied Mark; "but we are certainly inclined to join you."

"That's right, boys; you couldn't take a pleasanter trip."

"But we have heard that this 'labour traffic,' as it is called," said Mark, "is in reality not a whit better than the African slave trade, that England was at so much trouble to stamp out."

"Whoever told you that's a fool," exclaimed Pugsley indignantly. "Why, you can see for yourselves that 't isn't so. Whoever h'ard of African slaves bein' taken back to the'r homes agin? Them niggers hes done the'r three years, they've been paid for the'r work, they've bought whatever they like wi' the'r money, and now they'll be taken back to the'r islan's, wher' they'll be reckoned rich."

"But are not the islanders often kidnapped or taken from their homes against their will or by means of false promises?" inquired Mark.

"No, youngster," responded the captain; "at least none o' the Queensland labour vessels can be blamed for such goin's on. The labour traders from Fiji and the Germans from Samoa don't care what they do s'long's they git the'r hold full o' niggers. But ev'ry Queensland vessel takes a Gov'ment agent along, who takes precious good care that the niggers are treated fair and square."

"Then the Colonial Government regulates the trade and guards the islanders from ill-treatment?" asked Mark.

"You'd better believe it," replied Pugsley. "Why, they're a sight better off than lots o' Christians. Just to show you how keenly the Gov'ment looks after 'em, I'll tell you we've to give 'em's soon's they come aboard a flannel shirt, a pair o' trousers, an' a blankit; an' we're obliged to give 'em ev'ry day four poun's o' yams or a poun' an' a half o' rice or maize meal, a poun' o' pork, half a ounce o' tea, two ounces o' sugar, besides a ounce an' a half o' terbaker a week."

"They seem to be well provided for aboard the schooners, at any rate," said Mark; "but are those rations actually issued?"

"You can bet the Gov'ment agent won't let us chizzel 'em much," replied the captain. "In the old days I dessey the poor beggars got little enough to eat, an' were

badly treated into the bargain; but now they're nothin' less'n coddled—coddled till they're too blessed lazy to work."

"How are they treated when they get to the plantations?" asked Mark.

"Well, that's mor'n I can tell you," replied Pugsley. "They niggers'll allers grumble; they'll tell you they've bin knocked about shameful; but the Gov'ment looks after 'em, I 'spect, as much ashore as afloat, an' sees that they're properly treated. The law ses they're to hev two shirts, two pair o' trousers, a hat, an' a pair o' blankets give 'em every year, an' a daily ration of a poun' o' mutton or beef or two poun's o' fish, a poun' o' bread, five ounces o' sugar or syrup, two poun's o' vegetables, besides a ounce an' a half o' terbacker a week and other things. You can see they re pretty well looked after."

"Yes," said Harry; "but is the law actually enforced?"

"Well, youngster," replied Pugsley; "I can't answer for what happens ashore, but afloat the Gov'ment agents is as strict as strict; there's no circumventin' 'em nohow, an' I s'pose it's the same ashore."

"Do the islanders when they recruit always understand where they are going to be taken and what they will be expected to do?" asked Mark.

"Aboard the Queensland vessels they do," answered Pugsley; "it's on'y the Fiji and Samoa traders as deceives 'em. They tell 'em they hail from Queensland, an' make the niggers believe they're goin' to be well treated, an' if they can't get 'em no other way they smash the'r canoes an' pick 'em up out o' the water."

"Well, captain, you have completely dispelled our doubts," said Mark, "for which we hope you'll pardon us, and we'll ship with you if you're willing."

"Yes, lads, I'm willin'. I want a couple o' respectable fellers aboard, that's a fact; for my crew, 'cept the mate,

is as shady a lot o' beachcombers as you ever seen. Reg'lar seamen don't care to be cooped up in these yer small craft, so I'm obligated to take whos'ever I can git."

"There is another question I should like to ask, captain, before we settle," said Harry. "Are you sure you'll go to the Solomons?"

"Certain sure, lads. Several o' them niggers hes to be landed on the Solomons."

"Have you ever been to Napuka, captain?" inquired Harry.

"No; but I know where it is," replied Pugsley.

"Well, captain, what will you take to land us there?"

"Land you there, boys! You must hev took leave o' yer seven senses. Why, that's one o' the very savagest places in the islands. The niggers 'd eat you sure's sure."

"We'll take our chance of that, if you'll land us there," said Mark. "We'll 'work our passages,' as it is called, that is, we'll make ourselves as useful as we can, though we don't know much about sailing except what we picked up coming out from England, and we'll give you ten pounds into the bargain."

"That's about the cheapest sort o' crew I ever shipped," exclaimed Pugsley, with surprise depicted on every feature. "But what in the name o' fortune takes you to Napuka?"

"We're nephews of Captain Birtle, who was last seen at Napuka, and we want to discover what has become of him," replied Mark.

"You needn't quit Brisbane to learn what's happened him," rejoined Pugsley significantly; "an' if ye go there you'll hev proof positive, for they'll eat you too."

"Well, captain, we're determined to go; it's for you to say whether you'll take us," said Mark; "and we'll make the ten pounds a hundred if you can detain your ship two or three days while we're ashore."

"It's about the maddest thing I've ever h'ard of," declared Pugsley; "but I 'spect you'll change yer mind after you've seen a little o' the niggers. I'll land you at Napuka when we gets to the Solomons, if you're still inclined that way; but if you take my tip you'll stay aboard the *Polly Hopkins*."

So it was arranged, and the brothers at once telegraphed to Mr. Fletcher, thanking him for his friendly assistance and advising him of the step they had decided to take. They then purchased a couple of rifles, a supply of ammunition, and a miscellaneous assortment of articles, locally known as "trade," which constitute the circulating medium throughout the Pacific islands, and the same evening the *Polly Hopkins* dropped down the Brisbane River with the tide with the brothers aboard, fairly launched on their desperate adventure.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### ABOARD A LABOUR TRADER.

By sunrise the following morning the *Polly Hopkins* was outside Moreton Island, and, as the south-easterly trades were blowing steadily, the little vessel heeled gently over and breasted the waves in gallant style, as if to justify the character Captain Pugsley gave her of being a trim and staunch seaboat.

The captain surprised the brothers by allotting them a snug little cabin aft; Mr. Fergusson, the Government agent, occupying the corresponding one on the opposite side, while Bob Pillinger, the mate, had another, the captain's cabin extending across the stern.

The remaining cabin was utilised as a magazine and armoury, and it was evident from the careful manner in which Pugsley kept the whole of the arms and ammunition under lock and key, that it was not entirely friendship or favouritism that had gained cabin quarters for Mark and Harry; but that the captain had taken the precaution to keep round him the men on whom he could rely, as he entertained the worst possible opinion equally of Joe Crudden, the second mate and recruiter, who had quarters near the galley, and of the fo'c's'le hands, four of whom were whites, arrant beachcombers every one, known as Jack the Whaler, Cross-eyed Jim, Yankee, and Patsy Rogan; besides whom there were a Maori named Te Ranji, three Loyalty Islanders, and the negro cook, who answered to the name of Jamaica.

Though the brothers were called upon to take their share of the work about the vessel, Pugsley treated them in a manner as passengers, and, when their duties permitted, he gossiped familiarly with them. Mr. Fergusson also recognised them as of a different class to the ordinary seamen who shipped aboard labour trading vessels, and when his utterance was coherent, which indeed was but seldom, he conversed with them in a very friendly manner, and gave them much interesting information regarding the habits and traits of the islanders.

The Government agent was doubtless a worthy man, who honestly strove to carry out the law both to the letter and in the spirit, but he, like many of his *confrères*, was a confirmed drunkard, and, so far as his influence or authority was concerned, he might as well have been left at Brisbane as taken on board the *Polly Hopkins*. His supervision of the recruiting operations was a complete farce, for when the boats were out no one knew less of what was going on than the Government agent.

The islanders maintained their cheerfulness and continued their bargaining as long as the daylight lasted, and when night fell they reluctantly submitted to be driven below, where, however, they would have been fairly comfortable had they not been accustomed to an abundance of fresh air. The accommodation provided 'tween decks for the recruits exactly fulfilled the regulations of the Colonial Government, the height from deck to deck being 6 ft. 6 in., and there were fifty roughly constructed berths; but absolutely no provision had been made for ventilation, so that when even the thirty returning labourers were below the atmosphere soon became pestiferous. What it would be with a large number of natives confined for days together, with the hatch tightly battened down, may be better imagined than described.

The wind being fair, all hands were comparatively idle

as soon as the decks had been cleared up and things generally made ship-shape. The brothers quickly made themselves familiar with their duties, and Mark then devoted his spare time to carefully studying the charts and acquiring as intimate a knowledge of seamanship as the captain could impart. When he had made himself familiar with the names and positions of the various groups of islands, and the chief dangers to navigation in those waters, he turned his attention to the small collection of books Mr. Fergusson had ranged on a shelf in his cabin, among which were the Government regulations, framed upon the Polynesian Labourers Act, several books of travel and adventure in the Western Pacific, and a portfolio containing a collection of newspaper cuttings relating to the labour traffic.

Harry, for his part, acquired information, *viva voce*, by chatting with Pugsley, Fergusson, when coherent, Pillinger, and any of the white men he could induce to talk, and not even disdaining to converse with a native when he found it practicable to interchange ideas.

The captain told Harry he was confident of making a successful trip.

"Can't hev better bait than returning niggers," he said.

"Bait?" exclaimed Harry interrogatively.

"Yes, bait," repeated the captain, and he continued amusedly: "I'm blessed if the boy don't think I mean to slip a hook through the niggers' gills an' tow 'em overboard to fish with. No, youngster; every one o' them niggers is a sort o' advertisement; when the people see 'em come ashore wi' the'r boxes full, there'll be a reg'lar rush to recruit. Oh, the notion o' sendin' 'em back's a grand 'un. They wouldn't live long on the plantations if they didn't look forrard to goin' back some time, an' when you can git hold of a few returnin' niggers, you can 'most allers make sure of a good trip."



It was, however, not long before Harry was convinced that the roseate hues in which Pugsley had depicted the labour traffic were scarcely borne out by the accounts given by the islanders of their experiences, even after a liberal allowance had been made for the habitual complaining that the captain had stated characterised the natives. While an occasional remark dropped by members of the crew aroused Harry's suspicions that the reputation Pugsley enjoyed of being a consistently successful labour trader had not been gained quite so innocently and fairly as the captain himself wished the brothers to believe.

Pillinger said he had made but one voyage previously in a labour vessel, and he confided to Harry that he would never have made another but for the fact that he had fallen out with Simmonds, the master of the *Bonito*, and, having been landed at Brisbane, had squandered all his money.

"I was fair high an' dry," he said, "or I wouldn't a done any more recruitin'. I hed a reg'lar sickenin' of it afore; but I don't think Pugsley's such a bad sort. He won't lose his temper wi' the niggers like th' other skipper I sailed wi'."

"Why, what did he do?" inquired Harry.

"Oh, he got wild 'cause the niggers didn't take kindly to bein' aboard ship. Even them as 'as bin reg'larly recruited gets kind a homesick, an' them as 'as bin trapped is at times obstropolous as well; so once, when we was lyin' off Api, waitin' for the boat as had gone off to get yams an' nuts an' to pick up some more nigs, if a chance offered, some on 'em tried to jump overboard, an' the skipper he threatened he'd shoot two men for ev'ry one as got away. But he might as well a held his tongue, for when the niggers gets like that they don't care whether they're shot or drowned; jumpin' overboard don't mean escape to 'em, it means suicide."

"And did he shoot any of them?" asked Harry.

"He just did. He'd scarcely turned his back afore three Tannamen went over the side. He hears the splashes, an' rushes to the bulwarks, an' didn't wait a minit, but outs wi' his revolver an' peppers after them three niggers as was makin' for the shore. I guess he must a winged one on 'em, but they kep' on swimmin', so down the skipper rushes to the cabin an' back he comes wi' his Winchester, an', steadyin' hisself agin the mast, he lets drive. They were just beautiful shots, the first two; both o' the nigs slung up his han's an' sunk like lead; but th' other one had got too far away, an' he dived an' dived an' kep' down so long that nobody couldn't a taken aim at him."

"He got safely away then?" said Harry sympathetically.

"No, lad, he didn't," replied Pillinger; "an' if he hed the Api men 'ud a eat him. No; the skipper's shots hed bin h'ard by the boat's crew, an' they soon saw what was up, an' pulled along an' picked the nigger up just afore he reached the reef. He fought like mad, but they got him into the boat an' brought him aboard, an' as soon's he stepped on the deck the skipper puts his revolver to his head an' blew his brains out."

"And did no one interfere?" asked Harry.

"Interfere! I guess no one'd interfere twict wi' Cap'n Rogers. 'Twould a bin more'n his life was worth. But he wasn't satisfied wi' shootin' the poor wretch; he killed two other niggers from the same island so's they shouldn't try to escape an' make the rest cut up rough."

"But such horrible butchery doesn't go on now, does it?" demanded Harry.

"No, lad; niggers isn't so plentiful now. 'Twouldn't pay to knock 'em on the head like that now, even if the Gov'ment agent hed bin squared."

"How do they 'square' the Government agents, as you call it?" inquired Harry.

"Oh, in mos' cases there ain't much trouble about that," replied Pillinger. "Look at Fergusson there; a bottle o' whisky's enough to settle him, an' there's many a one o' the same sort. Some o' the Gov'ment agents are paid accordin' to the number o' recruits landed in the colony, an' you can bet they ain't extry partic'lar how the niggers 're cotched s'long's they is cotched. But they takes precious good care they ain't murdered after they comes aboard, an' they're precious careful wi' 'em if they turns sulky an' seems likely to jump overboard."

"You mean," said Harry, "that the agent shuts his eyes to kidnapping and man-stealing, or, in other words, doesn't interfere to prevent the violent abduction of the natives or their deception as to the terms of the agreement and the period for which they are to be employed?"

"That's about it," replied Pillinger; "only I couldn't a thought o' them long words."

"But when the kanakas have been secured, you say, the agent's self-interest prompts him to make them contented and to keep them healthy?"

"Yes, when he's got 'em he don't want to lose 'em, 'specially now that recruitin' isn't as easy as it used to be. It takes a man all his time now to get a full ship; the niggers is gettin' too fly."

"Besides," continued the mate, "cap'ns can make things precious unpleasant for agents if they're inclined to be over partic'lar. The agent's gen'ally got nobody else to talk to 'cept the cap'n, an' if the cap'n takes the huff an' sends the agent to Coventry, 'tain't 'zackly comfortable for him. He'll think a lot o' times, an' the goin's-on must be precious bad, afore the agent'll come to loggerheads wi' the cap'n if he can help it."

These statements, as may be imagined, did not calm the apprehensions of the brothers, who often discussed the aspect of affairs, and were sometimes disposed to regret

having trusted themselves on board the *Polly Hopkins*. Not that personal cowardice had anything to do with their uneasiness; what they dreaded was that cruelties and atrocities such as those of which they had heard would be practised before their eyes, and that they would be unable to prevent them.

For some time, however, little occurred to confirm their suspicions. The captain, whenever he took any notice of the kanakas, treated them kindly. He allowed them to leave the hold as soon as it was light in the morning; he permitted them to remain on deck some time after the sun had dipped below the horizon; he seldom interfered with their bargaining, except to settle by a rough and ready sort of arbitration a dispute when the kanakas actually came to blows; and, above all, he restrained the crew from ill-treating the islanders, as some of them were evidently disposed to do.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### RECRUITING.

MARK and Harry closely watched everything that went on aboard the *Polly Hopkins*, and they were re-assured when they observed the kindly disposition evinced by the captain ; but they were not so well pleased with the conduct of Joe Crudden, the second mate, who acted also as interpreter and recruiter, whose brutal character and savage instincts were apparent in almost every action, and who never missed an opportunity of tormenting or ill-treating the kanakas. The brothers noticed also that Crudden found a willing assistant in Te Rangi, a gigantic New Zealand native, who seemed to regard the South Sea islanders as a despicable race, only fit to be kicked and beaten.

In the course of Harry's inquiries he discovered that Crudden would have command of the boat that was sent out to obtain recruits, Te Rangi and three others making up the boat's crew ; while, where any danger was apprehended, Pillinger, in charge of the second boat, would go to protect the recruiter.

The arrangements for feeding the kanakas were not very elaborate, but they were fairly satisfactory, at any rate, for the few returning natives ; though Jamaica, the cook, appeared to have as much as he could do to prepare the rations that were served out to him. As soon as it was light he used to start the fires under two

huge pots, and an appetising odour quickly pervaded the ship, though the materials of the stew were merely pork and yams or rice. As soon as this was cooked the natives trooped along with their tin plates, and each received his share, and somebody else's too if Jamaica was not sharp enough to prevent him. This repast was repeated in the afternoon, and the kanakas filled in the intervals with snacks of all sorts that they cooked themselves. Sometimes there was no pork, but simply yams and cocoa-nuts, for it was found that constant pork diet disagreed with the islanders. Little attention was paid to the colonial regulations, but the natives received a sufficient, if somewhat unhealthily monotonous, diet.

Early one morning the island of Anieteum was reached, but though every expedient was resorted to to entice the natives to come aboard, not one could be induced to approach the schooner. Immediately the character of the vessel became known the natives paddled as quickly as possible back to their villages, concealed their canoes, and disappeared into the jungle; nor could they be persuaded even to trade with the vessel.

"They're altogether too fly down this way," said Pillinger.

"Yes," returned the captain; "we'll have to go north. I didn't expect much else, but 'twasn't any use goin' by without tryin'."

So the *Polly Hopkins* was headed north-westerly for Tanna, where she arrived the next day.

The excitement among the returning natives increased to fever heat as first the smoke from the volcano and soon afterwards the island itself appeared on the horizon, for three of the kanakas were Tannamen, whose joy at the prospect of so soon seeing their own people again amounted almost to delirium.

The schooner made good progress with the wind right

aft, and soon arrived within a mile and a half of the shore, along which she coasted until opposite the village to which the three kanakas belonged.

"B'leeve the cap'n's goin' ter be a blamed fool an' lan' the confounded niggers," Mark overheard Crudden mutter contemptuously.

"You leave the cap'n alone," responded one of the crew known as Jack the Whaler; "he knows what he's about. There's on'y three to land, an' they'll likely catch us three times as many."

"That's as maybe," growled Crudden. "I b'lieve a nigger in the ship's worth ten on the shore. I wouldn't let a blessed one land ef I'd my way."

"Your way's a dirty way anyhow," retorted Jack.

Mark's ideas of the morality of the labour trade were not strengthened by what he had overheard; for it was evident that Crudden was strongly opposed to landing the natives who had completed their three years' service, and that even Jack the Whaler, who appeared to be the most humane member of the crew, had no better argument to advance in favour of the fulfilment of the agreement than that it would induce a larger number to come on board.

The result, however, proved that Jack's hopes were not well founded. The three kanakas were duly put ashore, each with his cherished "bokkus," the whole population of the village lining the beach as the boat pulled in, and manifesting the wildest joy when they recognised their friends.

This raised Crudden's hopes, and when he found that the tribe had no captives to sell he lost no time in trying to persuade some of the younger men to go with him. Several of them appeared disposed to accede to his proposal, but several of the elder natives inquired what had become of the men who had gone away in company with those who had just returned; whereupon the recruiter,

with a volley of oaths, tried to pull several of the natives into the boat, but failed, and immediately ordered his crew to back out, for he knew that no men would volunteer when they had heard the accounts of the sufferings and death of their friends.

The joy with which the return of the labourers had been hailed was soon changed to wails of mourning and shrieks of rage as the kanakas told how their comrades had died. Some had been killed aboard the vessel that had taken them away, others had been suffocated in the hold, and many more had died from ill-treatment and overwork on the plantations.

Crudden had foreseen this danger; but it is probable that, had he boldly stood his ground, the Tannamen's anger would not have been directed against him or his crew. As it was, the men had to row hard to get out of range of the natives' muskets, which were continued to be fired long after the boat had gained a safe distance, more as a menace than with any idea of killing the recruiters.

"Three niggers landed for nothin'!" exclaimed Crudden beside himself with rage. "Might just as well a kep' 'em aboard an' made sure of 'em. There, they're blazin' away agin. They'd make dead meat of us pretty quick if they could ketch us. Gimme a rifle, an' I'll hev a pop at 'em. They shan't go on that way for nothin'."

"What's the good o' shootin'?" objected one of the sailors; "you'll on'y make it hotter for the next ship as comes along."

"I don't care ef I do," replied Crudden; "the confounded niggers shan't shoot at me for nothin'."

Te Rangi had in the meantime passed Crudden a rifle, and ordering the men to stop rowing and to steady the boat the mate took deliberate aim and fired, and a native on the beach sprang into the air and fell across one of the boxes, the contents of which he had just been admiring.



"Ha, ha! my boy, that gave you pepper!" cried Crudden exultingly, as he watched the effect of his murderous shot; for it was nothing less than murderous, let the act be viewed in whatever light it may.

It could not be said that the recruiters were in danger or even that they had been seriously menaced; for the "trade" muskets and ammunition of the natives were of the cheapest and most unreliable description, effective only at very short range, and often more dangerous to the marksman than to the object aimed at. It is extremely doubtful also whether the Tannamen would have fired upon the boat that had just brought their friends safely back had not Crudden's precipitate retreat encouraged the attack.

And even had the natives wreaked their vengeance upon the recruiters, could they be held blameworthy? How were they to distinguish these men from those who had enticed away their friends to be so cruelly treated and done to death? These men were of the same race and were pursuing the same trade.

Such conduct as that of the natives of Tanna would, in the case of Englishmen, be regarded as the noblest patriotism—the "brave defence of their hearths and homes"—or would be described by some equally high-sounding phrase. But the action of the poor islanders, whose prowess is their only protection—for there is scarcely upon record a single instance in which the men of war of England or of any other nation have interfered to punish those who have committed outrages upon the South Sea Island natives, though any attempt at retaliation by the islanders is followed by prompt and indiscriminate retribution—is regarded in an altogether different light.

The attack upon Crudden was described as "an attempted massacre," "a murderous outrage," which

amply justified the swiftest and most effective reprisals. "These treacherous natives must be taught to treat white men respectfully"—so their conduct is reported to the admiral on the Australian Station, and a ship is despatched to bombard the village, to cut down cocoa-nut groves, and so expose the islanders to the danger of famine, and to destroy their canoes, the result of weary months of labour. And all this for defending themselves against being carried off to become slaves, or for avenging the death of those who had been cajoled away and never returned. England should certainly be proud to employ her navy in such a noble work.

Alarmed by the fate of their comrade, the natives quickly disappeared among the bushes, to the disgust of Crudden, who had taken another rifle, intending to have a second shot at them; so with an oath, the mate ordered the men to row back to the vessel.

The schooner was standing off and on outside the points of the bay, and the boat's crew proceeded at a leisurely rate towards her, their course taking them within a short distance of the southern headland, which was covered with palms and undergrowth almost to the water's edge. When almost abreast of the point the men were startled by a volley fired from the shelter of the jungle, followed immediately by a flight of arrows, one of which took effect in the shoulder of the bow oarsman.

"Pull for your lives," shouted Crudden; "or the confounded niggers 'll pot ev'ry one of us."

The men needed no incitement to put forth their utmost strength, but they had got too close under the land to hope to escape altogether unscathed.

Crudden, who held the steering oar, with a couple of powerful strokes turned the boat's head seaward; but before they had gone many yards a second flight of arrows and another volley came from among the undergrowth on the

point, and the mate's left arm dropped against his side, as he cried with a string of oaths :

“ I'm winged ; but a bullet's better'n one o' them p'isoned arrows.”

The boat reached the schooner without further mishap, and though Crudden urged the captain to stand into the bay to take swift vengeance upon the natives, sail was immediately made, and the *Polly Hopkins* was headed northward for Erromanga.

Crudden's injury proved to be very slight, the bullet having lodged just under the skin in the fleshy part of the upper arm ; but the other man was at once seen to be fatally wounded, for the arrow had evidently been poisoned. He lingered, however, for nearly a fortnight in great agony, when lockjaw supervened and he died.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### KOROKO'S HISTORY.

THE events narrated in the last chapter naturally tended to increase the brothers' uneasiness as to the nature of the business in which they had so incautiously engaged, and Harry pursued his enquiries even more diligently than before, while Mark watched more closely than ever to ascertain the true character of the labour trade, and the methods, legal and otherwise, adopted by the traders.

Both Mark and Harry, however, discovered that very little more than they had already learned was to be gleaned from the officers or crew; for the captain and mates resented the brothers' obvious suspicions and the men had evidently been warned not to be unduly communicative. Under these circumstances Harry cultivated the acquaintance of a very intelligent Solomon islander named Koroko, whose fluent use of the sandalwood jargon denoted that he had had an extended intimacy with white men.

"What for you recruit?" asked Harry.

"Dis fellow no recruit. White fellow break canoe, take dis fellow out water, put down in shippy, take longa Brisbane. Make work too muchy hard tree yam (three years). Get plenty full bokkus. Shippy take dis fellow plenty far, no see him place. Cap'n wantee dis fellow go. Dis fellow 'fraid man all same debbil him kaikai (eat). Cap'n take dis fellow Brisbane. Make plenty too much work. Dis fellow plenty sick, tink stop (think die). Bimeby

tree yam, plenty full bokkus, shippy go plenty far, 'fraid no see him place, 'fraid cap'n take dis fellow Brisbane, make plenty too much work."

It was not difficult for Harry to understand what Koroko meant. The unfortunate islander had evidently been kidnapped in the first place by his canoe being accidentally or purposely run down or swamped in some manner, and when he was swimming in the water the ship's boat had picked him up. He had been taken to Brisbane and compelled to work on a plantation for three years, thus conclusively proving that the system of supervision of coolie immigration adopted in Queensland was nothing more than a farce, otherwise the circumstances under which Koroko had been captured would have been detected.

"Why did you not tell the agent at Brisbane that you had been taken away against your will?" asked Harry.

"Cap'n say man plenty angry dis fellow no work, maté, maté (kill) dis fellow."

"He told you that the agent would be angry and would kill you if you did not work?" repeated Harry in astonishment.

"O-o" (yes), replied Koroko; "maté, maté plenty quick."

"And so you worked three years?"

"O-o, tree yam. Get plenty full bokkus."

"And when the ship took you back you were afraid to go ashore?"

"No see him place."

"They did not take you to your own island, but wanted you to land at some other place?"

"O-o."

"And you were afraid?"

"O-o; 'fraid him kaikai."

"Afraid the natives of the place would kill and eat you?"

"O-o."

"Then the ship took you back to Brisbane, and you had to work for another three years, and you became so sick that you nearly died, and now at last you are on the way back to your own place?"

"'Fraid no see dis fellow place. Shippy no go."

"Does not the captain know where you came from?"

"Cap'n know; shippy no go."

"Do you mean that the captain will want you to go ashore at some strange place, and when you say "no" he will take you back to Queensland, and make you work for a further three years?"

"O-o," replied Koroko despairingly. "Dis fellow work plenty hard him finish."

"You think much more hard work will kill you?"

"O-o." And Koroko looked appealingly at Harry and said: "You say cap'n take dis fellow him place."

"I will, Koroko," replied Harry; "and it will go hard with him if he says 'no.'"

The native evidently understood Harry's words, for he knelt on the deck and embraced the young fellow's knees, at the same time saying something in his own language, which was probably a grateful expression, though it is said that no equivalent of gratitude can be found in any of the Pacific dialects.

Koroko's manner so deeply interested Harry that he asked the islander to relate his entire history, and with great patience he strove to understand the details which Koroko's limited vocabulary rendered somewhat obscure.

Without following the frequently interrupted conversations throughout their involved course, it may be interesting to give their substance in the shape of a continuous narrative.

Koroko told Harry that he was the son of a Solomon island chief, and that he had lived upon an island between

two larger islands. On one of these larger islands dwelt the fierce head-hunters, while the other was inhabited by a peaceful industrious tribe, who cultivated large patches of yams and other food products. This description, though not very precise, gave Harry the impression that Koroko's native place was situated somewhere in the neighbourhood of Napuka, and this belief imparted additional interest to the islander's narrative.

Koroko said his father's tribe lived very contentedly, the men fishing with lines and spears and shooting birds and small animals with bows and arrows, and the women digging the ground and planting yams and taro. Their only source of anxiety was the danger of attack by the head-hunters, whose raids were intensely dreaded. Extensive preparations were made to defend the village against these attacks, but sometimes the head-hunters made their descent unexpectedly, and before an effective resistance could be offered many of Koroko's people were killed and their heads carried off.

When Koroko grew up he took part in several of these conflicts, and Harry gathered, from his by no means boastful account of the fights, that the young chief's bravery on several occasions secured the victory for his own tribe. As the years passed on, the raids became less frequent, and at last almost ceased altogether, either in consequence of the increasing prowess on the part of Koroko's people or because the zest for head-hunting had declined.

But the abatement of one danger seemed but the signal for the inception of another. At irregular intervals for many years several ships had visited Koroko's island, bartering hoop-iron, beads, tobacco, knives, axes, and other articles for tortoiseshell, beche-de-mer, cocoa-nuts, birds' nests, and other produce. These traders were cordially welcomed and the most amicable relations existed between *them and the islanders.*

But there appeared on the scene a pretended trader, who watched his opportunity, and when a large number of natives had taken their produce aboard the ship, the captain enticed them into the hold for the ostensible purpose of examining some articles of "trade," and he then fastened down the hatches and sailed away, taking the islanders to work on the Fiji cotton plantations, a sudden demand for cheap labour having arisen in consequence of the American War having interfered with the world's supply of cotton.

The first of these kidnapping raids was more disastrous than even the worst conflict the islanders had ever had with the head-hunters, for by it they lost about eighty-five of their best men, but a very few of whom ever found their way back to their home.

But the sad experience thus gained made the natives more cautious in approaching the traders, and for a time no man-stealer succeeded in increasing his catch at Koroko's island.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### KIDNAPPED.

By this time Koroko had almost assumed command of the tribe, for his father was getting old, and though not by any means infirm, no longer possessed sufficient activity to take the lead in every tribal venture, whether it was a fishing expedition, a peripatetic dancing party, or a hostile foray, for even these industrious islanders indulged in an occasional raid upon their less valorous neighbours, chiefly for the purpose of obtaining the materials for their ceremonial cannibal feasts.

Success constantly attended Koroko's ventures, and having accumulated sufficient money to purchase a bride, and his choice having fallen upon Bebe, the daughter of a neighbouring chief, he wished to be married. But for a time various difficulties prevented the completion of the ceremony. At last, however, accompanied by several of his tribe, he placed the stipulated number of fathoms of dewarra\* in his canoe and paddled across the straits to the village where the object of his affections dwelt.

Everything connected with the marriage passed off satisfactorily; Bebe's father accepted the dewarra and delivered Bebe to Koroko, who decided to remain in his father-in-law's village for a few days, his attendants at once returning home.

For several days Koroko's friends were busily engaged

\* Native shell money, made up in strings, each a fathom in length.

preparing to accord him a suitable reception upon his return with his bride; but Koroko did not appear, and at last his father became anxious and thought of sending to ascertain what unexpected circumstance detained his son.

But all doubt was soon set at rest, for one afternoon the natives on the beach came running into the village with the news that a vessel was standing right into the bay, and that a man could be seen in the water swimming towards the shore.

No time was lost in getting two canoes afloat, and they were soon skimming the waves towards the mysterious swimmer. When the canoes were perceived by the people aboard the vessel in the offing, she was at once put about, and before long disappeared to the southward.

The canoes hastened on and picked up the man, who was so exhausted that for some time he could give no account of himself; but when he had recovered and recounted what had happened, yells of the wildest rage resounded through the village, as well as threats of vengeance against the perfidious white men.

The man stated that Koroko had started with Bebe that morning to return home in a canoe with six men at the paddles. They made good progress until the sun was high in the heavens, when they sighted a vessel that at once bore down upon them. When it had approached quite close to the canoe a man hailed them and inquired where they were going. Koroko replied, and the man offered to take them across to save them the trouble of paddling. After much persuasion Koroko consented to go aboard the ship, where the natives were received with much apparent cordiality by the captain, but immediately the last of the islanders had reached the deck they saw a sailor drop a large stone over the side into the canoe, breaking it so that it sank,

Koroko also perceived what had been done, and the captain laughed and said—

“You no savee now get longa your place. Bymby you catch that fellow place.”

Koroko immediately called upon the natives to jump overboard and swim for their lives and liberty. Without a moment's hesitation every islander made for the bulwarks, and five of the eight succeeded in springing into the water, Bebe and two of the others being caught before they could escape.

When Koroko rose to the surface after diving from the ship he looked about for Bebe, but could not see her anywhere. He called out to the others to scatter and make for the shore, and to dive as frequently as possible to evade the bullets that had already commenced to fall thickly about them. Then he dived under the vessel, but when he reached the surface on the opposite side he was again disappointed not to find his wife; and at last, becoming convinced that she had not escaped from the vessel, he deliberately swam back and clambered on deck again, where he was seized and taken down into the hold.

The vessel then followed the swimmers, and a boat having been lowered, three of them were picked up, two having been wounded by bullets, one so seriously that he was not considered worth keeping, so he was thrown back into the water.

The remaining native had separated from the others, and by the time they had been picked up he could not be seen from the boat. He thus secured a long start, and when the ship was headed in the direction he had taken, the wind fell so light that he had little difficulty in keeping out of range of the rifles; but, strong swimmer as he was, when the canoes went to his rescue he was in great danger of drowning through exhaustion.

These particulars Koroko learned from a member of his tribe, who was afterwards kidnapped, and whom he encountered in Queensland.

Koroko described the voyage to Brisbane as a long period of torture. The hold was literally packed with natives gathered from different islands, most of whom did not understand the language of the others; consequently, brawling and fighting were almost incessant. Sleeping accommodation had been provided for about fifty kanakas, whereas over a hundred and fifty had been crowded into the hold. The atmosphere was stiflingly polluted, strong men even fainting and exhibiting every symptom of suffocation, which ended fatally unless they were quickly carried on deck. Deaths from this cause were of daily occurrence, for among so many a fainting man was often unnoticed until he had expired, and frequently also, when one was perceived to be suffocating, the sailors paid no attention to the cry "Maté, maté!" or neglected to remove the sufferer until it became too late.

Naturally the favourite places were immediately beneath the hatchways, which when uncovered afforded a limited supply of fresh air; but the place of comparative comfort was also the place of danger, for not only did the natives fight to obtain the positions where they could breathe easily, but when the uproar caused by the quarrelling attracted the attention of those on deck, the muzzles of a couple of rifles appeared over the combings of the hatchway, and unless the noise in the hold abated a couple of reports were heard, and those kanakas who could not get under cover were shot or wounded.

Many narrow escapes had Bebe and Koroko, and many quarrels had Koroko on his hands before he had been on the vessel a week; for he resolutely fought to secure for his wife the best of everything obtainable, though for himself he cared not what happened.

When the islands had been left far behind, and the ship was out of sight of land, the kanakas were allowed to go on deck in batches ; but though Koroko and Bebe at first gladly availed themselves of a change that was a sort of respite from their horrible existence below, the unwelcome attentions that one of the crew attempted to pay Bebe caused them to prefer to remain in the hold throughout the rest of the voyage. As it was, Koroko narrowly escaped being shot or confined in irons for knocking the sailor down.

At last the terrible voyage came to an end, and while the ship was waiting to be towed up the Brisbane River the kanakas, about a hundred and twenty of whom survived, were carefully prepared for the official inspection by being dressed up, each man in a shirt and trousers, and each woman in a long nondescript garment and a petticoat, and receiving a coarse blanket apiece. These should, according to the colonial law, have been supplied to the kanakas when they arrived aboard ; but the articles were of the cheapest and flimsiest materials, and the traders knew that the garments would have been either worn out or have borne evidence of the fighting that had gone on and the ill-treatment that the natives had suffered had they been in use throughout the voyage.

The kanakas were then instructed to hold up three fingers, at the same time saying "three yam," which was taken to signify that they agreed to work on the plantations for three years, though the poor islanders neither knew how long a period those words implied nor what nature of work they would be expected to perform on the plantations. They were at the same time threatened that if they refused to work they would be killed.

Before being landed at Brisbane the natives were mustered to be inspected by the Government officer, whose duty was to see that the provisions of the Act of the

Queensland Parliament intended to regulate the labour traffic had been complied with. This officer discovered none to reject on account of them being "maimed, halt, blind, deaf, dumb, idiotic, or insane"; for the traders had carefully and summarily eliminated any such during the voyage by shooting them and throwing them overboard, or sometimes by throwing them overboard without taking the trouble to shoot them first.

The remaining formalities were soon gone through, though the mystery remains to be explained how the captain satisfied the inspecting officer that a hundred and twenty kanakas had had the statutory space—twelve superficial feet to each adult—on board a 180-ton vessel, nor does any report seem to have been made of the number of kanakas "lost" during the voyage.

The officer, with the assistance of an interpreter who could speak indifferently well only one or two of the many dialects represented in that motley throng, was very exact in requiring from each native an assurance that he or she had come voluntarily, and fully understood the terms of agreement under which he or she was to serve; but even had the bewildered islanders thoroughly understood what the interpreter said, the drilling they had had as to their conduct before the inspecting officer was effective in limiting their communications to that awe-inspiring functionary to holding up three fingers and saying "Tree yam," and nodding emphatically in response to everything that was said to them. They believed that was the only way of appeasing the great man, and of inducing him to spare their lives.



## CHAPTER XX.

### PLANTATION LIFE.

HAVING been "passed," the kanakas were soon applied for and taken up country by planters and squatters,\* Koroko being one of the first chosen by the proprietor of a sugar estate in the Mackay district.

To the young Solomon islander's profound dismay, he discovered that Bebe was not wanted by the planter, and that she was to remain to be selected by some other applicant.

"Take Bebe longa this fellow," he pleaded earnestly.

"Don't want any Maries," replied the planter unsympathetically; "they won't work themselves, and they make the men lazy."

"Take Bebe longa; this fellow work all same two fellow," implored Koroko.

"You'll have to work all same two fellow whether Mary goes or not," derisively replied the planter. "I won't have any more women about the place."

Koroko vehemently supplicated, protested, and raved in his bitter disappointment and consternation at the prospect of being separated from his wife, though in expressing his objections he firmly believed he was courting instant death. But his prayers and threats were alike unheeded, and Bebe was finally allotted to a Darling Downs squatter.

\* Sheep and cattle farmers.

In his helpless rage, Koroko sturdily refused to be parted from his wife; the poor girl, on her part, being paralysed with grief and dread, and fully persuaded that her husband would be killed before her eyes for so bravely defying the terrible inspector. But that official was imperturbably good-tempered, and disregarded with equal nonchalance the islander's prayers and the demands of the planter and squatter that force should be used to separate their coolies. Such matters did not come within the scope of the inspector's duty, so he simply ignored the disturbance, and left the parties concerned to settle the difficulty in whatever manner they thought advisable.

Of course wealth won. The planter and squatter enlisted the assistance of two constables, and the heart-broken Bebe was torn from Koroko's despairing embrace, though even the policemen scarcely relished the task they had undertaken, and hastened to hand the dejected kanakas over to their employers' men.

Sullen with despair, Koroko was taken in company with a number of other coolies to the Mackay plantation; while poor Bebe, her eyes burning with incessant weeping, was placed on a bullock dray and carried over the hills to her master's station.

It is impossible to conceive the depth of the misery of the newly arrived kanakas employed on the sugar plantations. Children of Nature, unused to anything in the shape of systematic labour, accustomed to constant change of occupation—to-day fishing, to-morrow hunting, another day feasting, and never being called upon to perform an appointed task within a specified time—they were all at once taken away to a strange place and compelled to rise in the bitterly cold, frosty grey dawn, and, clad in the thinnest, scantiest clothing, were driven forth, after partaking of a hasty meal, to work in the fields amongst the canes, dripping and heavy with freezing moisture. Their



garments soon became saturated, and remained wet until the sun gained sufficient warmth to dry them.

On and on toiled the poor islanders, until the sun reached the zenith, when a short intermission was allowed for a second meal; then on and on through the long, sweltering afternoon they laboured; and when the glowing disc sank in the west, the miserable kanakas, staggering with exhaustion, were allowed to drag their aching limbs to their little thatched huts, to pray for death as the speediest deliverance from their hopeless lot, and to curse the "white fellows" who stole them from their happy island homes.

At certain seasons the coolies had to remove the "trash"—dried blades and spathes—from the canes, an operation requiring no special exertion, but compelling the labourer to pass backward and forward throughout the field, where the atmosphere becomes literally stifling, the tall canes preventing any wind from finding its way among the mazy avenues, and the fervid sun raising the temperature to a degree unbearable by white men, and extremely enervating even to the natives of the tropics.

Some of the kanakas were put to work in the sugar mills, where they had to toil in an unhealthy, steamy atmosphere, feeding the canes into the crushers, skimming the clarifying tanks, and emptying the coolers.

Is it surprising that many of these men fell ill? Would it not rather have been wonderful if they had retained their health? There, in a climate admittedly deadly to white men—men accustomed from boyhood to hard manual labour in varying climes—these savage, untutored natives were obliged to toil hour after hour from dawn till dark, exposed to every change of temperature and suffering acutely from the unusual physical exertion. The sick list was always a long one, and the death register showed an appalling ratio of mortality. Few escaped

pulmonary affections, and thousands died of consumption long before their term of service expired ; but they were kept at work as long as they could stand upon their feet, and then they were allowed to lie down and die like so many worthless animals.

Koroko's youth, splendid physique, and healthy constitution enabled him to endure the hardships of his position, while many of his comrades labouring beside him succumbed. At first he was sullen and intractable, but the overseer of the plantation was accustomed to dealing with "refractory niggers," as he called them ; and Koroko soon discovered that unless he worked hard he would die hard. For although, according to law, no punishment should be inflicted upon any kanaka unless by a magistrate's order, there are other ways of breaking a man's spirit than by flogging him.

No, the kanakas were never formally beaten ; they were starved into submission, and many of those who did not readily submit were literally starved to death, for their strength was so completely undermined that when they eventually became docile the toilsome daily round quickly prostrated them, and a sick kanaka seldom recovered, even if he received the most attentive treatment, which very rarely was the case.

Medicine was duly administered to sick coolies because the law required that it should be so, and because it was an effective way of discouraging malingerers ; but when a kanaka became really ill he was simply physicked and left to die, or, when practicable, he was sent off to a hospital, an expedient that not only saved the planter any further trouble, but avoided causing a depression, almost amounting sometimes to a panic, among the surviving kanakas.

Koroko eventually became outwardly submissive, and worked well and intelligently ; but his hatred against the "white fellows" increased with every kick and indignity

he was obliged to suffer, and had his comrades shared his spirit every white man on the plantation would have been massacred. Many plots were formed in the coolies' huts, but Koroko soon found that the islanders were not to be depended upon. They were a gathering from many tribes, and were thus separated into small coteries, each of which distrusted every other, so joint action was impossible. This was the white men's only safeguard.

At last the "thirty-nine moons," that Koroko had so carefully kept count of on a piece of knotted cord, were completed, and the Solomon islander was duly forwarded to Mackay for shipment back to his home. He was joyful at the prospect of soon seeing his people again, and at possessing a "bokkus" full of articles of almost inestimable value according to native ideas.

He was placed aboard a small brig, and was soon among the islands; but the well-remembered outline of his native place never greeted his longing gaze. Day followed day, until he became heartsick with the prolonged suspense, and when finally the brutal captain offered him the choice of being landed upon a strange island, with the certainty of being killed and eaten by hostile natives, or of re-engaging to work in Queensland, the mere instinct to cling to life constrained the unfortunate fellow to accept the latter alternative. Accordingly he and his fellow labourers, with but few exceptions, were taken back to undergo a second term of slavery, with even less hope than before of ever seeing their homes again.

Koroko's crushed spirit rendered him less capable of enduring the hardships of his servitude than during his previous term, and it was his ill-fortune to be allotted to a squatter notorious for ill-treating his coolies.

Away over the ranges the poor islander was taken, and in the midst of a dense forest he was set to work felling tree after tree and stacking cord after cord of

wood, until his vitality seemed to ebb away with every stroke of the axe. As his daily quota diminished in consequence of his inability to perform his allotted task, so his rations were curtailed and the brutality of his taskmaster increased. Despairing and heart-broken he relinquished all hope of ever escaping from his horrible bondage, and became so ill that even his callous master recognised the futility of kicking him to urge him to work.

Nauseous medicine was given him, but it had no good effect, because perhaps he had no desire to recover, and he was regarded as a doomed man. Fate, however, otherwise decreed. A good angel, the young daughter of the squatter, happened at this time to visit the station, and, much against her father's wish, she immediately took pity on the sick coolies, Koroko becoming the object of her especial solicitude. She provided for him nourishing food and many other comforts, and insisted upon the poor kanaka being carefully attended. Yet had these been the only restoratives she administered, Koroko would still have died; but she evinced so much anxiety concerning the poor islander's condition and was so untiring in her acts of thoughtful kindness on his behalf, that she at last rekindled his interest in life, and though his recovery was slow and tedious he gradually regained his health.

Even when Koroko was once more able to leave his hut, the young lady's influence obtained for him an amelioration of his hardships. He was kept near the home station to assist about the place, and he was never weary in attending upon his young mistress.

The remainder of Koroko's second period of service thus passed rapidly away, and he was even sad when the time arrived for him to return to Brisbane, for he entertained but slight hope of being taken back to his native island, and he dreaded being consigned again to cruel bondage as a coolie.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### HUMANE PLOTTING.

"WHAT shall we do for the poor fellow?" asked Mark, when Harry recounted to him the story of Koroko's misfortunes.

"I don't see that we can do anything just yet," replied Harry; "we can but wait and see whether the captain intends to land Koroko on his own island, and if he attempts to carry him back to Queensland, I for one shall give him plainly to understand that I intend to expose the whole of the nefarious business."

"Still," said Mark, "we must be careful how we act, for we must remember we are in these men's power, and that, even if we were allowed to live until the ship returned to Queensland, the influence of the planters and squatters would be exerted to silence us or to discredit our statements."

"I understood the squatters did not employ coolie labour?" remarked Harry inquiringly. "I thought Koroko was mistaken when he spoke about working on a station."

"It wasn't intended by the planters that they should," said Mark. "The planters, single-handed and solely on their own behalf, fought the battle which resulted in the Colonial Legislature sanctioning the 'labour trade'; but so long as plenty of 'boys' were forthcoming, the planters considered it in the highest degree inexpedient to raise

any objection to the squatters participating in the benefits of an ample supply of cheap labour."

"You seem to have been studying the history of the labour trade," observed Harry.

"Yes," replied Mark; "I've been reading those books in Mr. Fergusson's cabin, and I can see by a collection of newspaper cuttings he has made that the colonists have gone into the trade with their eyes perfectly open to its drawbacks and dangers, for there has been no lack of warnings and opposition to it."

"He was a clever man who struck upon the idea of calling it the 'labour trade,'" said Harry sarcastically; "it's a much pleasanter expression than 'slave trade.'"

"Yes, that had a good deal to do with the planters allowing the squatters to 'stand in' with them," rejoined Mark. "The squatters' countenance and support were invaluable in the constant efforts that have to be made to drown the outcries and protests against 'slavery.'"

"Yet slavery it is," continued Mark indignantly; "and not 'ill-disguised' slavery either, as it is flabbily termed by the few colonial newspapers that simulate courage by touching delicately upon the subject. It is slavery, with incidents as black and as inhuman as the worst cruelties ever attributed to the planters of the American Southern States; slavery in which the brutal employer has not even the incentive of self-interest to preserve the slave's health or to feed and clothe him in a way to keep the breath of life in his body; slavery on a system so vile that it is absolutely profitable for the planters to work the kanakas to death within the three years for which they are legally enslaved."

"Legally!" exclaimed Harry contemptuously. "The colonists ought to feel dishonoured and degraded by having such an infamous law on their statute books."

"Some of the accounts of atrocities and cruelties may

be exaggerated," said Mark; "but any dispassionate observer must condemn the system."

"If you had heard Koroko's story from his own lips," responded Harry, "you would say that the vileness of the system could not be exaggerated."

"Unfortunately the books I have been reading afford official confirmation of the poor kanaka's story," said Mark; "yet no one dares to publish such statements, though the facts must be known to many people. Whenever any hint of the sort appears in print the advocates of the coolie system denounce the writer as a sensation-monger; but the official statistics—the statistics compiled by the Government responsible for the shameful enactment under which this slavery was made possible, and, therefore, not likely to present the case in its worst aspect—show that of eighteen thousand islanders landed in Queensland less than ten thousand are recorded as having been shipped back to their homes."

"Horrible!" cried Harry. "It's worse than I thought it could be."

"And," continued Mark, "if what Koroko says is true—and Crudden's protest against the captain's 'foolishness,' as he called it, in landing those three Tannamen would appear to corroborate him—perhaps the majority of those ten thousand never reached their homes."

"I'd wager anything," exclaimed Harry, "that most of them were carried back to the colony, and that only those used as 'decoys' ever saw their homes again."

"And," argued Mark, "even if the colonial law were observed in its integrity—if every islander were legally recruited and had fully explained to him the nature of the contract he was invited to enter into—is it possible for the colonists to deceive themselves into believing that the system is not pure slavery? How can they imagine that the islanders can be fairly induced to leave their homes,

where they enjoy a life of ease and plenty—where 'tis always afternoon'—to toil from dawn to dark day after day on a plantation? They must know that the recruiters make deceptive promises and that the poor natives are cajoled by delusive persuasions."

"There would be very few recruits," assented Harry, "if the labour traders honestly told the islanders what they would have to do when they were landed in Queensland."

"From what I have read," said Mark, "I am convinced that some of the Queensland planters—a very few perhaps—use their coolies humanely and give them the full advantage of every provision of the colonial law, besides treating them kindly and liberally."

"And they lose nothing by it, I am sure," interjected Harry; "but no degree of humanity can prevent the system being one of unmistakable slavery."

"Well, we can only watch what goes on aboard this vessel," said Mark; "and from what we've seen of Captain Pugsley I should think the *Polly Hopkins* is a very favourable specimen of the labour traders."

"Yes," assented Harry, "the captain treats the islanders kindly enough; but I don't like the way he speaks of them sometimes, just as if they were cattle. The only man aboard I've any real confidence in is Pillinger; he doesn't like the trade at all."

"The crew are a rough lot, as the captain said," observed Mark; "but the very worst man aboard is Crudden. We must watch him closely; he has no friendly feelings towards us, I am confident."





## CHAPTER XXII.

### BRITISH JUSTICE!

FROM Tanna Captain Pugsley steered for Erromanga, but the wind falling light the *Polly Hopkins* made but slow progress.

The morning after leaving Tanna a sail was sighted on the starboard bow, and by noon the two vessels had approached each other and exchanged signals, from which it appeared that the stranger was H.M.S. *Nautilus* bound on a cruise among the islands for the purpose of repressing kidnapping and generally regulating the labour traffic.

When the British man of war found that the schooner was a Brisbane labour trader, a boat was lowered and a lieutenant in full uniform boarded the *Polly Hopkins* and thoroughly inspected her, carefully examining her papers and the accommodation provided 'tween decks for the islanders.

Of course the inspection proved satisfactory, for the vessel was in perfect order and only the twenty-seven returning islanders were on board, and there had been sufficient notice of the visit to allow Mr. Fergusson, by the aid of a few "pick-me-ups," to be sober enough to put in an appearance; so the officer complimented Captain Pugsley upon the state of his vessel and the discipline of his crew.

The lieutenant noticed, however, that Crudden's arm was in a sling, and that one of the crew was seriously, if

not fatally, wounded, and he naturally required an explanation of the circumstance under which the men came by their wounds.

So excellent an opportunity for enlisting the support of Her Majesty's navy was not to be neglected, so Captain Pugsley made a formal report of the attack made by the natives of Tanna on his boat's crew.

"We've just come from Tanna," stated Pugsley, "where we'd had a narrer shave of havin' the niggers right aboard us."

"How was that?" asked the officer.

"Why, we'd three Tannamen to land, an' we coasted along until we got opposite their village—Black Beach, you know—on the south-east coast."

The officer nodded his assent, and Pugsley proceeded:

"Well, we'd no sooner got the three men an' their boxes ashore than a reg'lar rush was made for the boat, an' our men would a bin scotched if Crudden hadn't noticed 'em in time an' pushed off. They'd a few muskets an' plenty o' bows an' arrers, an' they lets drive, but our men gets away without gettin' hit, though the bullets an' arrers dropped all roun' 'em."

"How did they come to be wounded then?" inquired the lieutenant.

"I was a comin' to that," replied Pugsley. "Well, the men rowed hard for the schooner, for they suspected treachery, an' wanted to warn me 's soon's might be; but when they was roundin' the point another lot o' niggers, who'd evidently bin planted there, opened fire, an' Crudden were winged an' Yankee gets an arrer in his shoulder."

"Did they follow the boat?" asked the officer.

"No; but they would a come aboard us if they'd a stopped the boat."

"Was the attack quite unprovoked?"

"Unprovoked! Why, we'd just landed their mates, an'

they'd evidently planted themselves afore ever we reached the shore at all."

"Yes; the attack appears to have been pre-arranged," said the lieutenant; "but perhaps they mistook you for some other vessel."

"That mebbe; but us landin' their mates ought to a satisfied 'em we were friendly."

The brothers, who heard what Pugsley stated, were surprised at the gravity of the event as he represented it, for the men had spoken of the affair as quite a trivial incident; but even had they known why the trader wished the lieutenant to believe that a desperate attack had been made it is doubtful whether the brothers would have felt justified in interfering, because nothing had been stated that could have been denounced as absolutely false.

The lieutenant was most exacting in his inquiries, and finally he insisted upon Crudden accompanying him on board the *Nautilus* to give his account of the "attempted massacre" to the captain of the man of war."

Soon after Crudden returned from the *Nautilus* the breeze freshened and the schooner stood away on her course, the man of war shortly disappearing beneath the horizon in the direction of Tanna.

There was great jubilation aboard the *Polly Hopkins* when Crudden gave an account of his interview with the captain of the man of war, for he stated that the *Nautilus* was even then on her way to punish the Tannamen for having treacherously attacked the boat.

Mark and Harry could scarcely believe that such could be the case.

"Surely," exclaimed Harry, "they won't punish the poor natives on our uncorroborated statement."

"Oh, yes, they will," said Pillinger. "Why I've knowed 'em to be laid on to a village just 'cause the niggers wouldn't trade. The men o' war's mighty useful

at times, though there's times when you don't want to run up agin 'em."

"But the natives have a right to defend themselves against kidnappers," said Harry.

"But we don't happen to be kidnappers," retorted the mate.

"But many of their people were taken away and only three returned," urged Harry.

"Well, they ought to think themselves jolly lucky to get them three back," said Crudden; "they wouldn't ef I'd hed my way."

"Perhaps they mistook this vessel for the one that carried their friends away," observed Mark.

"They'll pay pretty dear for their mistake then," returned Crudden complacently.

"What will the man of war do?" asked Mark.

"Do?" repeated the recruiter. "Why! I guess she'll about blow them niggers off the island; or, if she catches any of 'em, up to the yard arm they'll go, just to learn th' others to be more civil in future."

"Well, I don't care what you think," exclaimed Harry indignantly, "but I say it's nothing less than shameful that the vessels of the British navy should be used for such a disgraceful purpose. It's an outrage. If the islanders are to blame—and I don't see that they are—"

"What's that, youngster?" cried Crudden. "Warn't the wretches to blame for wingin' me an' sendin' Yankee there to Davy Jones's locker?"

"You killed one of them first," retorted Harry hotly.

"See here," exclaimed Crudden in a passionate voice; "you're a youngster, an' don't know much about what yer talkin' about; but, if yer take my tip, ye'll not talk no more o' that sort while yer aboard the *Polly Hopkins*. We're all mates here, an' we all stan' by one another.

Mebbe you'll be shot at next trip, an' we'll then see how you'll talk about it."

The brothers could see by the circle of angry faces around them that they could expect no sympathy or support from anyone aboard the schooner, but that, on the contrary, Crudden's views found favour with them all, so Harry wisely obeyed Mark's warning signal and said no more on the subject.

On a subsequent occasion, however, the brothers reopened the question with Pillinger, by asking him whether it was the regular practice for the men of war to shell the native villages when any outrage was reported to have been committed by the islanders living there.

"Yes; that's just what the men o' war's cruisin' around for," replied the mate.

"Do they not make inquiries first?" asked Mark.

"Oh, yes; they send a couple o' boats ashore. But likely enough nobody knows the lingo, an' they've got to make 'em understand as well's they can by signs. An' if they can't do that, they blaze away an' knock the'r village about the'r ears."

"It's too shameful," exclaimed Harry.

"They makes mistakes at times, I must allow," said Pillinger. "Why, on'y about a year an' a half ago they was told about some massacre somewheres in the Solomons, an' they set to work droppin' the'r shells into a village where yer uncle had a station, where the niggers was as quiet as mice. They've spoilt a lot o' tradin' by mistakes o' that sort; but, as I said afore, you can make 'em useful at times, when you want a lot o' niggers knocked into the'r senses."

"Do they really attend to the regulation of the labour traffic?" inquired Mark.

"Well, they do if they gets the chance," responded the mate. "They're allers mighty officious; but when a ship



gets full, she don't go foolin' roun' no mor'n she can help ; she don't lose no time in gettin' to wherever she's goin', so there's not a many overhauled as has niggers aboard. An' you can mostly tell where the men o' war's likely to be, an' when you don't want to see 'em you keeps out o' the'r way."

"Then they really assist the labour traders rather than regulate them," said Harry.

"They sartainly takes the fight out o' some o' the niggers that'd be precious troublesome if the men o' war wasn't round," admitted the mate.

The brothers afterwards learned the full particulars of Crudden's misleading statement to the captain of the *Nautilus*, for it was taken down by the captain's secretary and published as part of an official report. From the same source they also discovered that the *Nautilus* at once proceeded to Tanna and sought out the old chief of the tribe to which the three returned islanders belonged. He was called upon to deliver up the "ringleaders" of the recently attempted massacre, the naval officer refusing to believe the statement that the white men in the boat had brought the attack on themselves by trying to run off with some of the natives and by shooting one of the islanders. When it was found that the islanders would not deliver up the "culprits," the men of the *Nautilus* destroyed all the canoes they could find, cut down several cocoa-nut groves, and shelled the village until every hut was demolished, the natives seeking safety by flight.



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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### “BLACKBIRDING.”

THERE were no returned islanders to be put ashore at Erromanga, but the captain thought he might as well call there on his way northward to Vaté. A few canoes put off from the island as soon as the schooner hove in sight, but when she was recognised as a labour vessel the natives lost no time in regaining the beach.

Crudden's curses were loud and plentiful as he saw the canoes make off, and he muttered something about the captain's "softness" for not having been prepared to "cut some of 'em out."

Seven men among the returning kanakas belonged to Vaté, the next place of call, which was reached two days afterwards, the *Polly Hopkins* bringing up in Havannah Harbour, at which place several white men were settled on cotton plantations.

The natives, however, belonged to a village further along the coast, and they objected to be landed at Havannah Harbour, because they would run great danger of being kidnapped before they could reach their homes either overland or by sea. So, some yams, pigs, and other fresh provisions having been taken on board, the *Polly Hopkins* sailed out past Reception and Deception Islands and proceeded northward.

Towards noon the islanders' village was reached, and, to Crudden's disgust, the seven men and their belongings



were lowered into the boat, which the recruiter was ordered to take ashore.

The scene of rejoicing that had been enacted on the beach at Tanna was repeated at this place, but it was not followed by an angry outburst on account of some of the recruits being missing. The Vateans accepted the good things the returned men brought for them and made no inconvenient inquiries.

This suited Crudden, who, by the distribution of a few judicious presents to the chief men, soon had six recruits in the boat; for though it is enacted that the labourers are not to be obtained by purchase in any sense of the term, that is, that no consideration money or "trade" is to be given to any one when the islanders are recruited, labour traders know very well the uselessness of trying to procure "boys" until the chief men of the tribe have been placated by gifts of more or less value.

Nothing less than wilful blindness to the conditions of existence among the Pacific islanders and persistent deafness to the representations repeatedly made by missionaries, travellers, and traders were shown by the Queensland legislators when they adopted a provision so ridiculous as the one forbidding any reward to be given to anyone on account of the obtainment of a recruit. To permit the trade and by the same enactment to disallow the only method by which the trade could be carried on, simply invited the recruiters to ignore the law, especially as proof of any such infringement was practically impossible.

The colonial Parliament possibly flattered itself that it had effectually safeguarded the weaker tribes from being captured and enslaved by their more powerful neighbours; but, sad to relate, the nefarious practices that rendered the African slave trade so unspeakably horrible, obtained to a degree fully equal, when the relative density of the



populations is considered, among the beautiful islands of the Western Pacific.

Chiefs, in order to possess a coveted musket, would barter away even members of their own tribes; but their general custom was to make raids upon their neighbours for the purpose of obtaining captives, who were exchanged for "trade" when next a recruiter appeared. And yet its advocates strenuously protest against the vile business being called "slave trading."

Crudden, not satisfied with the six men he had obtained, urged the chief to let him have some more, but without avail.

"It's hanged bad trading," he said, "when you put seven men ashore an' on'y take six men away. That's a fool's game."

"Get some to come aboard to trade," suggested one of the crew.

So Crudden shut down the lid of his trade box, and told the islanders they would have to go aboard the schooner if they wanted anything else. This they showed great reluctance to do, for they were evidently aware that islanders who went aboard labour vessels very frequently remained there, voluntarily or involuntarily.

The Vatéans proposed that the boat should remain on the beach as a sort of hostage, while the canoe put off to the ship; but such a plan did not suit Crudden, who recognised the danger of being within the clutches of the natives at a time when the captain might take the opportunity to forcibly persuade a few of the islanders to go with him to Queensland.

Convinced of the futility of remaining longer on the beach, Crudden returned to the schooner, to be greeted by the captain with black looks as he stepped on deck:

"Couldn't you manage more'n half-a-dozen?" Pugsley inquired tauntingly.

"Hadn't no more ready," replied Crudden.

"Where do these belong to then?"

"Oh, somewhere round t'other side o' the island."

"Couldn't you get none o' their own men?"

"No; they're gettin' too precious wide-awake through the Hebrides; they won't recruit."

"What'll we do? Six for seven ain't good enough," and the captain looked angrily towards the shore.

"Tried to get 'em to come off, but they wouldn't less the boat stayed ashore."

"Well, I'm gettin' about tired o' this slow sort o' biz," grumbled Pugsley; "I'm four niggers worse'n when I lef' Brisbane. If we don't git some better sort o' luck we'll have to make it."

"That's just what I've said all along," responded Crudden triumphantly. "You've been a deal too squeamish."

The *Polly Hopkins* stood off and on across the bay until the sun approached the western horizon, when, finding that no canoes would venture to come out, the vessel's course was made due north for the island of Api.

The wind was fresh and the schooner scudded along, passing the islets of Mau, Mai, and the Shepherd's Group during the night, and sighting Api early the following day. The swell on the reef, however, was so heavy that the captain hesitated for a time to order the boat out, and when at last Crudden put off from the vessel it seemed impossible to cross the reef, for the huge waves formed a glistening wall of spray for miles in an unbroken line.

The boat coasted along for some time, but no passage in the reef could be discovered, and eventually Crudden returned to the ship without landing.

Not long afterwards a canoe was observed to cross the line of surf and to make its way slowly towards the schooner. When it arrived alongside the natives it

contained wished to trade, and offered a small pig and some yams.

"No want yams or pig," said the captain.

"Plenty good yam," reiterated the Api men persuasively.

But the captain would not buy. When, however, the natives held up some beautiful branches of coral, he pretended to admire them, and a couple of pieces having been handed up to him he refused to return them, but placed some Turkey red cloth and a knife on the rail, and told the Api men to come and get them, an invitation they hesitated to accept.

While this little comedy was enacting on one side of the ship, Crudden had been busily engaged getting the boat into the water on the other, and no sooner had it been manned than, at a signal from the captain, a piece of stone ballast was thrown into the canoe, a large hole being driven through it so that it sunk, and the natives now fully aware of their dangerous predicament set off to swim ashore as fast as they were able.

Crudden and his crew rapidly overtook one after another of the swimmers, and they were hauled into the boat and securely bound, though not without desperate struggling. By the time the fourth native had been captured, the remaining swimmer had very nearly gained the reef. Crudden saw that it would be useless to continue the pursuit, but he was determined that the islander should not escape to carry the tidings ashore, so he levelled his rifle and, at the second shot, the man was seen to throw up his arms and disappear amid the snowy foam.

The whole of these proceedings had been closely watched from the deck of the schooner, and acquainted as Mark and Harry had become with the lawlessness of the traders' methods, they were horrified to find their worst fears confirmed; they had incautiously associated themselves with



a crew of reckless man hunters—men without compunction so far as the lives and liberties of the islanders were concerned.

Without a moment's hesitation Mark strode up to the captain, and looking him boldly in the face demanded—

"What is the meaning of this, Captain Pugsley?"

"There, there, youngster!" said the captain in a tone intended to pacify the young man; "don't make such a fuss. We must git the niggers somenow, an' if they won't come aboard quietly, why, we must make 'em."

"Do you mean to say you will countenance that murder Crudden has just committed?" cried Mark indignantly.

"Murder! I didn't see no murder," responded Pugsley derisively.

"You saw Crudden shoot that man in the surf," said the young man emphatically.

"I heerd a couple o' shots, an' 'spect Crudden was tryin' to frighten one o' the niggers; but as for the man in the surf, why, I see him climb on to the reef, an' likely's not he's back to the village by this time."

"You may pretend ignorance if you like," said Mark defiantly; "but you know well the man was shot; and I can tell you I'll not stand by and see such a cowardly murder committed without protesting against it."

"Protest away, then, young fellow; it won't do no harm," retorted the captain sneeringly.

"You will find my protest not quite so harmless as you seem to expect," exclaimed Mark, heedless of the captain's threatening looks; "for I shall most certainly report this murder to the authorities when I return to Brisbane, if an earlier opportunity does not occur."

"Oh, that's yer temper, is it, my fine fellow," angrily rejoined Pugsley. "Then we must see that you don't get the chance to peach," and with a threatening gesture he turned and went into the cabin.

"You're quite right, dear old boy," said Harry warmly, grasping his brother's hand; "but we must be watchful," he continued in an undertone, "for I can see we haven't a friend on board. They'll murder us before we get to Brisbane unless we can outwit them."

"Where's Mr. Fergusson?" cried Mark, still excited at the thought of the crime he had witnessed. "I'll report the murder to him."

"You'll have to wait until you can catch him sober," responded Harry. "He's not been out of his cabin for a week, and I heard them saying he'd an attack of delirium tremens."

"Then we must not expect any assistance from him," said Mark; "for he could not report the murder to the authorities without disclosing that he was not sober when it occurred."

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"The boat soon reached the beach."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A PROFANE DECEPTION.

PORT SANDWICH, in the island of Mallicolo, was the next place touched at by the *Polly Hopkins*, and as the brothers had heard that a missionary was settled there, they hoped to be able to communicate with him. But the schooner only remained at this place while a few yams and a couple of pigs were brought off from the shore, and then coasted northward.

The next morning a village was noticed, and a large number of natives gathered on the beach to watch the schooner.

Mark and Harry observed Crudden speaking earnestly to the captain, and then the order was given to lower the boat.

Meanwhile, Crudden had gone to his cabin, and by the time the boat was ready he reappeared dressed to resemble a missionary and carrying a book in his hand.

Mark and Harry were ordered to take places in the boat, and though they felt convinced that some black deed was about to be committed they could not see how to prevent it.

The boat soon reached the beach, when Crudden unhesitatingly stepped ashore and commenced speaking to the islanders in their own language. Of course the brothers could merely surmise the purport of what Crudden said, but they were disgusted beyond measure when it became obvious that he was pretending to preach.



When he had continued speaking for about a quarter-of-an-hour he began to sing, but apparently he had forgotten—if he ever knew—any hymn, so instead he sang "Marching through Georgia," after which, at his direction, the natives knelt around him on the sand while he pretended to pray.

He next distributed among the islanders the loose leaves of an illustrated book of travels to represent tracts, and with a final exhortation he stepped into the boat and gave the order to return to the vessel.

The brothers could not at first understand the object of this impious masquerade, but Crudden's parting words had evidently been an invitation to the natives to go on board the schooner, for no sooner had the boat's crew reached the vessel than several canoes were launched, and before long sixty islanders had clambered up the side and were standing on the deck, where Crudden welcomed them and made them presents of a few brass buttons and some red cloth.

The Mallicolo men were delighted with their prizes, and joyfully and unsuspectingly accepted an invitation to go below to select some more articles as gifts.

Down the poor, deluded islanders went, pushing and hustling each other in their eagerness to be among the first at the expected distribution.

Crudden had preceded them down the ladder, and when they had all descended he produced several reels of cotton and about half-a-dozen boxes of beads of various colours. He quickly measured off short lengths of cotton, which he distributed among the natives, telling them that they might take as many beads as they could thread.

The islanders were soon busily employed threading the beads as rapidly as they were able, those who could not get to the boxes watching anxiously while their comrades accumulated what to them were great riches.

Seeing the boxes becoming rapidly empty some commenced to murmur. This was the opportunity Crudden had expected, so promising to return with some more beads he ran up the ladder, which was immediately afterwards hauled up, and the hatch being replaced the deceived islanders were securely captured.

"Nothing like the missionary dodge, after all, to catch the niggers wholesale," exclaimed Crudden, jubilant over his achievement.

"Yes, you don't damage or lose so many that way as you do when you have to swamp the'r canoes," assented the captain; "but unfort'nately you can't try it on 'cept on the islan's where the sky-pilots a bin."

"Well, it's makin' the trip look a trifle more healthy, ain't it?" said Crudden, with evident self-satisfaction.

"'Tis indeed. How many's below? Did you git a slant to count 'em?" inquired the captain.

"Yes. I checked 'em off as I paid out the cotton. There's fifty-eight?" replied Crudden.

"Fifty-eight and thirty makes eighty-eight. By Jove! we're a full ship a'ready," exclaimed Pugsley with a satisfied grin. "But I s'pose we must gammon to land the rest o' the returned niggers."

"Yes," replied Crudden. "Fergusson's drunk enough now to know nothin' o' what's bin goin' on; but 'twouldn't do to go right back to Mackay, 'cause they'd know we hadn't had time to go to the Solomons."

"Besides," said the captain, "there's them confounded youngsters; it wouldn't do to take 'em back to Queensland in the'r present temper. We must drop 'em somewheres on the way, an' that 's soon 's we can, for it 'd be orkard to drop in wi' another cruiser just now."

"Look here, cap'n; there ain't goin' to be no trouble wi' them youngsters."

"How's that, Crudden?"

"Oh, easy enough. We hed a couple o' softies aboard the last trip but one—you know, Cap'n Cree's brig, the *Pearl*. Well, the young beggars wouldn't help in gettin' niggers nor nothin', an' they kicked up a reg'lar fuss when anythin' happened to one o' the darkies. What d'ye think we did?"

"I don't know. How did you manage to fix 'em?"

"Why, we made half-a-dozen o' the niggers wild by stoppin' the'r tucker, an' then we sent the softies to quieten 'em. The niggers just jumped at 'em, an' they hed to hit out to save themselves. They didn't do no harm, but we gammoned they'd killed one o' the nigs, an' after that we didn't hev no fuss, nor didn't hear no more about lettin' the Gov'ment know all about our goin's on."

"We must try it on with these here fellers; but they're precious fly, an' p'raps they'll give us some trouble."

"You just leave it to me, cap'n; I'll fix it all serene."

"Well, old feller," said Pugsley familiarly slapping the recruiter on the shoulder; "we'll go through the Solomons, an' I daresay you'll manage to git a nigger for ev'ry nigger we put ashore."

"Look here, cap'n, if you'll take my tip, I'll keep them twenty aboard, an' bag another fifty or sixty afore we leave the Solomons."

"Oh, that'd be comin' it too strong altogether," objected the captain, though his gratified expression belied his words. "Where'd we stow 'em?"

"Stow 'em! They'd soon stow themselves. You could get a hundred an' fifty inter the hold without losin' more'n a dozen goin' across."

"We'd better stop at a hundred, if we can get 'em," suggested the captain.

"But look at the head-money. You'd get seventy quid extry, if we could land, say, a hundred an' forty, an' I'd bag

a nice thirty-five quid, while the men'd feel pretty proud wi' the'r fourteen poun' apiece."

"Well, mate, I'll think over it; an' if a streak o' luck should happen to fall in our way, you bet I'm not agoin' to say 'No' to it."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### ISLAND BEAUTIES.

No time was lost in making sail and leaving Mallicolo far astern, and soon the *Polly Hopkins* passed to the east of Ambrym, one of the most remarkable islands in the Pacific Ocean. Not more than three miles and a half in diameter, it attains an altitude of five thousand feet above the sea level, its summit being the crater of a volcano, named by the natives "Lopevei," which is believed to exceed both in size and awful grandeur even the great Kilauea crater of Mauna Loa, in the island of Hawaii.

Here is absolutely virgin ground for the adventurous explorer, for as yet no man has ever set foot on the rugged sides of this wonderful volcano. The inhabitants of the adjacent islands entertain an unconquerable dread of the place, so that no bribe will overcome their superstitious fears sufficiently to allow them to accompany the intrepid traveller who attempts the ascent.

The schooner coasted along the eastern shore of Pentecost Island the whole of the following day, and towards evening the lofty summit of Aoba appeared on the horizon.

There were three Aoba men among the returning labourers; fine, handsome fellows, of a much lighter complexion than most of the islanders—a clear, pleasant copper colour—and with delicately moulded aquiline features.

Captain Cook and his companions, when they first visited the Island of Aoba, were astonished at the light colour of the natives, which they attributed to disease, and accordingly they named the place "Leper's Island," which it is still sometimes called.

The schooner remained hove-to during the night, and as soon as daylight appeared stood in for the landing-place.

The scene in the bright morning light was beautiful beyond description. Aloft above the grey morning mist rose the vast mountain, over three thousand feet out of the limpid, sparkling waves, the slopes and valleys densely wooded, but dotted here and there with many clearings, the yam plantations of the industrious natives, surrounded by neat pig-proof hedges or stone walls. Lower down were the cocoa-nut groves, amidst which the thatched roofs of the native houses gleamed in the bright sunshine.

The coast of Aoba is rugged and precipitous, but there are many coves and bays with smooth sandy beaches, where a safe landing may be effected. The wind was light, but still sufficient to give the *Polly Hopkins* steerage way as she glided towards a narrow opening on the west side of the island.

After breakfast the Aoba men brought their precious "bokkuses" on deck, and soon the creaking of the davits signalled that the boat was being lowered. It had scarcely touched the water when the Aoba men scrambled over the side and took their places, each perched on his "bokkus." Crudden quickly followed with his "trade" box well stocked with articles he considered likely to tempt the islanders, and the boat's crew was made up of Mark, Harry, Jack the Whaler, and Te Rangi.

"After you've put them niggers ashore," Pugsley called out over the bulwarks, "if you don't git none to bring off, work down to Kangopasa. I'll stand off an' on, an' keep a bright look-out for you."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Crudden; "we'll be back by midday, if not afore."

The vessel lay a couple of miles out, in order not to lose the wind by getting under the shelter of the island; so the men had a good pull before them; but, as there was scarcely a ripple on the water, the exercise was merely an enjoyable change from the comparatively idle life aboard the schooner.

The sun was just peeping over the mountain as the boat entered the bay at the head of which the village they were bound for was situated. The rocky points on each side of the channel were not more than thirty yards apart, and as the boat darted through the opening, the still waters of the lovely bay echoed and re-echoed with the shrill laughter and noisy chatter of forty or fifty women and children, who were splashing about in the water and scampering along the snowy white coral sand that formed the beach. The scene was one of the prettiest pictures of native life that could be imagined.

The young children were the dearest and most entertaining little rogues—rogues actually, for they proved to be arrant young thieves. Innocent-looking large-eyed young urchins, they fearlessly crowded round the boat as soon as it ran up on the beach, and, with the most confiding expression, fixed their lovely eyes upon one after the other of the men, at the same time preparing for a dash at anything they could seize, and whenever attention was withdrawn from one of them for a moment he immediately stole something and darted off with it.

Many of the young women were absolutely beautiful, with bright, clear complexions, in which the roseate hue of health distinctly appeared. Their features were delicate, their eyes large, dark, and lustrous, their mouths perfect rosebuds, and their figures so rounded and graceful as to be fit models for the sculptor. The maidens of Aoba were beyond compare the belles of the Pacific.

Their attire was simplicity itself, as it consisted of a finely-plaited grass petticoat reaching a little below the knee, the upper portion of the figure being uncovered and unadorned save by a number of shell armlets and necklets of coloured beads.

Alas, that the beauty so lavishly bestowed by Nature should be but an additional danger to these already sorely-beset islanders.

To the deep disgrace of beings calling themselves civilised, the horrible labour traffic carried on with the countenance of the colonial governments and under the protection of the British flag, has had grafted upon it a horror at the exposure of which even the most hardened and vile should writhe with shame.

At most other places in the islands the recruiters prefer to entrap men, but at Aoba they especially direct their most enticing persuasions and employ their most alluring tricks to secure the young women.

That they have succeeded only too well in their truly devilish pursuit is terribly apparent. Already there are unmistakable signs of the rapid decadence of this handsome race, and it is but a matter of a few years when the beautiful Aobans will be exterminated as effectually as if they were all slaughtered.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### "FIJI MARY."

THERE were only the women and children to welcome the three returned labourers, but no fault could be found with the cordiality of the reception they met with, though perhaps the circumstance that Crudden distributed gifts of beads with a generous hand and magnanimously overlooked the petty thefts of the children had something to do with the general rejoicing.

The women were not in the slightest degree shy or bashful ; they scrambled for the beads and bandied jokes among themselves, and doubtless at the expense of the white men.

Prominent among them was a fine, tall woman, rather handsome, but for an expression of subdued fierceness. Her movements were lithe and graceful, as indeed were those of all her companions, and after closely scanning the white men, she stepped boldly up to Crudden and offered to sell him some native trinkets.

To propitiate her, the recruiter purchased the articles at the price she set upon them, and then he asked her :

"You been longa Queensland ?"

"No," the woman replied ; "man belonga Fiji steal me long time ago."

She then described how, whilst out fishing in her canoe, a whale boat manned by a Fiji crew and a white man had surprised her, and how, though she strained every nerve

to reach the shore, knowing full well the fate in store for her should she be captured, they caught her and dragged her into their boat, after which they broke her canoe, and rowed back to their vessel, which was lying behind the point.

Her young husband, to whom she had been married but a few days, watched the whole affair from the cliff, but he was powerless to help her.

She then described the voyage to Fiji, and narrated her terrible experiences after she reached that place, but they were of a nature that cannot be more than alluded to. There was no protection for her ; she was a stranger in a strange land, and even if she had known that redress was possible, she knew nothing of the language in which only a complaint could be heard.

When at length her term of service expired, she was returned to her native place, but only to find that the three years had worked many changes. Her husband had married again, her father was dead, and her kindred looked coldly upon her, for they shrewdly suspected the sort of life she had been compelled to lead. At last an old man had married her, and once more she was happy.

Crudden was surprised at the woman's loquacity, but he regarded it as simply a desire to air her accomplishment of sandalwood English, so he decided to humour her.

"What's your name?" he inquired.

"Me Fiji Mary," she replied. "Man belonga Queensland, me like him too much," she continued caressingly.

"You want catch him plenty boy, eh?" she asked suddenly.

Crudden assented.

"S'pose you want him, me get him five fellow; he go longa you to-night."

"You shall hev an axe, some 'bacca, an' a lot o' beads, if you get me some boys," Crudden readily promised.

"S'pose you like, me bring him five fellow longa boat. Bymby sun he close up finish (sundown), you come longa this fellow place, me get good fellow boy go longa you Queensland."

Fiji Mary spoke so earnestly and with such apparent good faith that Crudden fully believed what she said, but the recruiter pretended to doubt her.

"Man belong Aoba he no like it go longa Queensland," he said.

"S'pose you want him, five fellow like it go longa Queensland," and she held up her open hand to emphasise the number of men she was prepared to obtain for him.

Crudden gave her some tobacco and a few beads as a sort of handsel, and promising to return before sundown, he ordered the men to row back to the schooner.

The captain was surprised and annoyed when he saw the recruiter returning so soon without an islander in his boat, but he was mollified when Crudden told him of the appointment he had made with Fiji Mary.

"Fiji Mary!" exclaimed Pugsley. "That name sounds familiar-like; I'm sure I've h'ard something about her some time or another, but for the life o' me I can't remember now what it was. However, you'd better go, but don't forget to keep yer eyes about yer."

About the middle of the afternoon the natives aboard shouted "Smoke ho! Smoke ho!" and looking towards the bay a thin column of smoke could be seen, the usual signal to a ship at sea.

"She's waitin' for us, cap'n," said Crudden. "I s'pose I'd better be off at once."

"All right," responded Pugsley; "but don't stop a moment after dark. Them natives is a treacherous lot."

The same men again manned the boat, and as they were pushing off from the schooner the captain called after them—

"I'll keep a good look out for you, an' if I don't see you afore dark I'll burn a blue light once in a while. When you see it, fire a couple o' shots, one quick after th' other, an' I'll heave to."

Crudden nodded, and once more the boat sped towards the shore.

As the boat entered the bay the crew looked about in all directions, expecting to find Fiji Mary and her friends awaiting them, but not a living soul was to be seen. A fire was burning on the beach and emitting volumes of smoke, but no other sign of life was visible.

Crudden evidently disliked the appearance of things, but he ordered the men to pull towards the fire, and he would have beached the boat but for the remonstrance of Jack the Whaler, who growled out—

"See, here, mate, them niggers ain't up to no good. If ye'll take my advice ye'll stan' off till some on 'em shows theirselves. I wouldn't trust that Fiji Mary no furdern I could see her."

Crudden, though usually disinclined to accept a suggestion from any one, saw the wisdom of Jack's warning, and when the boat was about thirty yards from the beach he gave the order "Hold water."

And there the boat remained for nearly half-an-hour, the men lolling on their seats, with their oars drawn in across the gunwales, while the mate leant on the steering oar and looked towards the beach, impatiently expecting the appearance of the Aoba woman with the five men she had promised to obtain.

Not a sound was to be heard; the stillness was death-like; not even a tiny ripple breaking on the sand, the rustle of a leaf, or the flight of a bird disturbed the profound silence.

Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, the reports of several muskets rang out from among the undergrowth,

the alarming noise bursting in upon the prevailing stillness with an intensely startling effect. The white men were for a moment completely bewildered by the unexpected attack, and sat helplessly staring at one another. They soon recovered from the shock, however, to find that no one had been wounded, though the steering oar had been splintered by one of the bullets.

A deafening yell, that seemed to burst from the jungle on every side, assisted to hasten the movements of the white men, who, in obedience to Crudden's order, were straining every muscle to turn the boat's head seaward as rapidly as possible, the steering oar, that would have swept the boat round with a few strokes, being practically disabled. Before this operation could be accomplished, some seventy or eighty natives, a few armed with muskets, but the majority carrying bows and arrows, bounded out upon the sands and delivered a flight of arrows that fell in and around the boat, but everyone again escaped injury, and a few minutes' rowing took them out of range of both the bows and the muskets.

When they had reached about the middle of the bay Crudden ordered them to cease rowing and to take their rifles.

"What are ye up to now?" demanded Jack the Whaler discontentedly.

"You mind yer own business, and do as yer told," rejoined Crudden.

"Yer a blamed fool if yer don't git out o' this blamed rat-trap 's soon's ye can, wi'out waitin' to pop over a stray nigger or two; that won't do no good."

"I ain't a goin' outer this till I've give that Fiji Mary a taste o' lead, 'f I can manage it," exclaimed Crudden fiercely.

"While yer foolin' roun', the blamed niggers 'll plant theirselves at the openin', an' we'll hev it pretty hot when we try to git outer this."

Without doubt Jack's view was the correct one, for the beach was once more deserted, and, but for an occasional sound, first on one side of the bay and then on the other, the stillness was as profound as ever.

But Crudden obstinately refused to accept Jack's advice a second time, until at last, finding that the natives were determined not to expose themselves, and as the shades of evening were fast closing round them, he told Jack and Te Rangi to resume their oars, at the same time ordering Mark and Harry to sit facing the bows with their rifles ready to pick off any natives who showed themselves.

The brothers intensely disliked the duty allotted to them; but they could not see upon what ground they could object to Crudden's order; nevertheless, they exchanged a whispered assurance as they took their places, that nothing but the most imminent danger should induce them to fire upon the islanders.

As soon as the boat commenced to move towards the entrance, a woman's voice, loud and jeering, rang out from the jungle, and the signal was repeated by many voices on the headland on each side of the channel leading to the open sea.

"That's Fiji Mary, confound her!" cried Crudden angrily.

"Yes, we're properly trapped, as I told ye we'd be," retorted Jack.

"Well, who's afraid?" shouted Crudden tauntingly.

"I ain't fer one," said Jack calmly; "but it's no use keepin' them youngsters in the bows. We'll go slow enough if they pull, but we'll be reg'larly potted if they don't."

"Don't you think ye'd better take charge o' the boat," exclaimed Crudden; "yer advisin', an' suggestin', an orderin' as if ye was a blamed commodore."

But Crudden was obliged to adopt the man's advice,

for as the boat drew near the channel, the natives, who carefully kept under cover, commenced firing, and soon the arrows were falling thickly around the boat, one striking Crudden on the leg, at which he became so seriously alarmed that he excitedly called the brothers to take their places at the oars, exclaiming :

“ Now, boys, you'll hev to pull for yer lives. Lay into it ! ”

It needed no exhortation from the mate to rouse the men to exert their utmost strength. Without a word, every man threw his whole power into each stroke, and the boat fairly flew through the water.

But the situation was most critical. Dusky forms could be seen flitting from rock to rock and from tree to tree, pausing occasionally to fire or discharge an arrow and then instantly disappearing. Their excitement, however, interfered with their aim, for whilst the boat was running the gauntlet it was struck by only two bullets, though many shots were fired. Many arrows stuck in the boat, but for a time it seemed that everyone but Crudden would escape uninjured.

It was not to be, however, for just as the boat cleared the last point and all danger appeared to be past, an arrow buried itself deeply in Jack's shoulder, and, though he doggedly continued rowing, the expression on his face convinced Crudden that the poor fellow had received a mortal wound.

As soon as the boat was quite out of range, the recruiter ordered the men to cease rowing, and he took several of the arrows that had fallen in the boat and closely examined them to ascertain whether they were poisoned. To his evident horror he found that they were. He immediately took his knife and cut away the flesh from the wound he had received in the leg, and, not satisfied with even that heroic precaution, he placed a small quantity of gun-powder in the wound and exploded it.

When he had thus attended to his own injury, and endeavoured as best he was able to counteract the deadly virus with which the islanders poison their arrows, he turned to Jack and offered to do what he could to relieve him; but the poor fellow had already made up his mind that his case was hopeless, and though he allowed the arrow to be extracted, he refused to permit the wound to be scarified.

"I feels the p'ison burnin' in ev'ry part o' me. I'm a gonner. It's no use cuttin' me about an' punishin' me any more."

Jack's conviction proved only too well founded, for he had scarcely reached the vessel before he lost the power of his limbs, and though he lingered in great agony for several days, he eventually died of tetanus. And thus was lost the only member of the crew who could be said to have had a humane fibre in his heart, for though he regarded the natives as mere animals, he objected to wanton attacks being made on them, as he would have opposed the punishment of an unoffending dog.

Crudden's wound entailed no serious consequences. Either the prompt measures he took were effective in counteracting the venom, or, as was probably the case, the arrow that struck him was not poisoned, for several of the missiles found in the boat proved to be common fish arrows.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### SAMOAN AND FIJIAN TRADERS.

CAPTAIN PUGSLEY was very wrath that the Aoban expedition should have resulted so disastrously, for which he blamed Crudden, though he might, with much greater justice, have condemned his own treacherous memory; for when he had listened to the recruiter's account of the affair, he remembered that he had been warned concerning Fiji Mary's inveterate hatred of the labour traders, and cautioned against trusting any representations she might make.

"You were a fool not to ketch the women when you had the chance," said Pugsley to Crudden; "they're as good or better'n the men at that place. Likely enough the men were away inland somewheres."

"It's all very good to be wise now the thing's happened, but it seemed to be better to get some men by fair words than to steal a few o' the women. We couldn't a caught more'n two or three."

"Well, you put three men ashore, an' you've got nothin' to show for 'em."

"Can't hev good luck always," growled Crudden. "You didn't grumble when I nabbed them fifty-eight wi' the missionary dodge."

"No, mate; you're right there," the Captain replied, his good humour returning at the remembrance of the recent achievement; "I s'pose we must average things—put the good 'uns agin the bad 'uns."

"That's about what you must do," sulkily responded Crudden. "Where're we goin' next?"

"Oh, we'll run along Santo. I don't expect we'll git much for our trouble; but we can try."

The vessel was accordingly headed due west, and before morning Espiritu Santo was sighted, and the *Polly Hopkins* coasted along northward.

Early in the day a brig was observed close in shore, and when the schooner came nearly opposite the place where the brig lay it became evident that something unusual was happening aboard the stranger.

Captain Pugsley made out the brig to be the *Belle Marie*, a Samoan labour trader, and curious to learn what sort of a difficulty she had got into he stood in towards the land, and, as events proved, the *Polly Hopkins* turned up in the very nick of time to avert a massacre.

The recruiter of the *Belle Marie* had induced about twenty islanders to ship in the belief that they were to be taken to Queensland. When the natives got on board they were taken into the cabin to prevent them from communicating with the other labourers, who would have told them whither the brig was bound. It was intended to keep them in the cabin until the vessel had sailed out of sight of land, and immediate preparations had been made for getting away. But before this could be done, by some unexplained means the natives learnt the destination of the brig, and when they found that the doors of the cabin were locked, they commenced to break everything in the cabin, and one of them, having found an American axe, proceeded deliberately to cut through the side of the vessel.

The captain, armed with a brace of pistols, rushed in among the infuriated islanders, when one of them struck him a severe blow on the head with the butt of a spear that had ornamented the wall of the cabin. The wound

was painful but not dangerous, and the native who inflicted it paid for his temerity with his life, for a bullet from one of the captain's pistols passed through his jaws.

The islanders fought desperately, and were on the point of overpowering the crew when the *Polly Hopkins* hove in sight and alarmed the natives, who took to their canoes and made for the shore.

"It's just our luck," grumbled Crudden. "When there's niggers willin' to go to Queensland, some blamed Fiji or Samoa feller turns up and steals 'em."

"I wish the men o' war'd run them confounded Fiji an' Samoa traders off," exclaimed Pugsley fervently; "they're spoilin' the trade everywhere. If I'd a known the sort o' fix that feller were in I'd a lef' him to git outer it as best he could. If the niggers hed massacred him, 'twouldn't a mattered much."

The strong prejudice the islanders entertained against recruiting for Samoa greatly astonished the brothers, though they remembered that Pugsley had told them that such was the case; but they had detected the captain in so many instances of misstatement that they were inclined to doubt the correctness of every assertion he made.

"Why do the islanders object to go to Samoa, while they are willing to recruit for Queensland?" Harry asked Pillinger.

"Well, lad, the fact is niggers never git back from Samoa; once they're took there, there they stops till they die. It's the same wi' New Caledonia, an' the niggers has took such a down on Frenchies an' Germans—'man-a-wee-wees' they call 'em both—that it's useless for 'em to try an' recruit labour; they're 'bliged to trap niggers to git 'em at all."

"Are they willing to go to Fiji?"

"No; they don't like Fiji much better'n Samoa. They treats the niggers bad in Fiji, an' when they're sent back

they're pretty far gone wi' consumption, or some other complaint."

"But that's the case with a good many of the Queensland labourers also, isn't it?" inquired Harry.

"Yes," admitted Pillinger; "but I fancy some o' the niggers must git back from Queensland all right. At any rate, whenever they're minded to recruit it's allers Queensland they chooses; but, as you can see, there ain't much genuine recruitin' to be done now-a-days."

The schooner proceeded on her way northwards, and the following day, as she rounded the eastern headland of St. Phillip's Bay, she came upon a Fiji labour trader that had just landed about eighty returned islanders.

Crudden was beside himself with passion when he heard what had been done.

"Why, we'd a give you a good price for ev'ry one o' them niggers," he cried, addressing the Fiji captain.

"Well, I don't know that you would if you'd seen them," responded the stranger.

"How's that?" inquired Pugsley.

"Well, you see, the majority of them were not in very good health."

"Oh, I understand," said Crudden. "That certainly alters the case."

"Yes, they were about as sick a lot as I ever had anything to do with. We started with ninety-eight, and lost about eighteen coming across, and a good many of those who have been landed will not live long."

"But it's precious strange you should hev hed as many's eighty Santo men in one batch. They don't recruit freely as a rule," remarked Crudden.

"I've nothing to do with that," replied the captain of the Fiji vessel. "According to my papers the men were all from Espiritu Santo, and on Espiritu Santo I've landed them."

"But all on 'em can't hev come from the one place," objected Crudden.

"I had no particulars as to which villages they hailed from. They were stated to be natives of this island, and in landing them here I've done what I undertook to do."

"I guess you've pervided the niggers on this coast wi' the stuff for many a feast," remarked Crudden with grim humour. "Where hev you landed 'em?"

"Just round the point there, in the bight," replied the Fiji captain, pointing to an indentation in the shore.

"What do you say, cap'n," inquired Crudden turning to Pugsley; "shall we run in an' see whether any on 'em's worth takin'?"

"Yes, I s'pose we may's well," responded Pugsley.

The Fiji captain ironically wished them luck, and immediately made sail and stood away to the eastward.

The *Polly Hopkins* was taken as close in as possible; and as the little bay was opened out the poor islanders were seen congregated on the beach.

Immediately they perceived the schooner they shouted and beckoned excitedly, the native manner of beckoning being precisely the opposite of that of civilised people; thus they stood upon the sands frantically waving their hands away from themselves and towards the schooner.

The noise they made in hailing the vessel must have attracted the attention of the local natives, for before the schooner's boat could reach the shore fifty or sixty dusky forms came bounding over a ridge a few hundred yards from the beach, and without a moment's pause rushed down upon the unfortunate strangers.

A terrible scene of carnage ensued. The returned labourers fought with the bravery of despair, but none of them were armed, while their assailants, besides bows and arrows, had heavy clubs and native axes, and some carried "trade" tomahawks. The conflict was so unequal

that it lasted but a few minutes, all but about a dozen of the strangers being mercilessly butchered. The survivors were securely bound and carried over the ridge, and the bodies of the slain were dragged away in the same direction.

The boat had remained about fifty yards from the shore throughout the massacre, Crudden ridiculing Mark and Harry's entreaties that something should be done to save the poor labourers.

"D'ye think we come here to fight for a lot o' sick niggers? Not much. If we'd hed the chance to pick a few o' the wellfist of 'em, I'd a fought to keep 'em; but p'raps it's as well as it is; nothin's worse aboard a labour vessel than to hev some sick niggers; it frightens the whole lot."

"But can't we do anything to rescue those they have taken alive?" pleaded Mark.

"'Twouldn't be worth while riskin' going ashore for that lot. Most on 'em used up, or they wouldn't a bin sent back from Fiji. An' I don't care to run into danger wi' this game leg on me."

So the boat returned to the schooner and she proceeded on her way.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### MANTRAPPING.

THE *Polly Hopkins* threaded her way through the Banks Group without calling at any of the islands, though a vigilant watch was kept whenever she was close to land. The natives of these islands are noted for their fierceness, and their weapons are tipped with a poison so deadly that the slightest scratch from one is fatal, so it is not surprising that this group is carefully avoided by the labour traders, who seldom land there.

As the schooner was passing between Vanua Lava and Mota, a canoe with a long heart-shaped sail was espied proceeding westward. Pugsley at once altered his course to intercept the canoe, and, notwithstanding that the natives tacked repeatedly and tried every manœuvre to escape, the schooner steadily gained on them and at last crashed into their outrigger and capsized the canoe.

Te Rangi and four others at once put off in the boat and picked up the natives, but one of them, evidently determined not to be taken alive, attacked the New Zealander with a spear which he had retained in his grasp when thrown into the water. Te Rangi, naturally afraid that the weapon was poisoned, hesitated to come to close quarters with the islander, who, taking advantage of the momentary pause, and grasping the side of the boat, hurled the spear at the Maori, and then dived out of sight.

The quickness of eye for which the Maoris are famed alone saved Te Rangi, for the weapon was well aimed. The Maori, however, nimbly evaded the missile, and, vowing vengeance, gave chase to the swimmer, who, when he rose to the surface, was only a few yards ahead of his pursuers. Before he could gain breath for a second disappearance beneath the waves the boat was upon him, and Te Rangi's tomahawk crashed through his skull.

Eight islanders were added to the schooner's cargo by this exploit, bringing the total number aboard up to ninety-three, and a course was shaped westward for the Torres Islands, where also no landing was attempted.

After leaving the Torres Islands, a due north course was set, and in two days the island of Vanikoro, in the Santa Cruz Group, was reached. Here another attempt was made to run down a canoe, but it failed, the natives successfully eluding the pursuing schooner by dashing boldly in amidst a very network of coral reefs, where Pugsley dared not follow.

A north-westerly course was then made, and the *Polly Hopkins* passed to the westward of Tapua, but failed to entice any of the islanders to come off to the vessel.

Nitendi, the largest island of the group, was the next place sighted, and here, much to Crudden's joy, the schooner was mistaken for an ordinary trader, and a large fleet of canoes put off from the shore immediately the schooner brought up opposite the village of Lelouova.

The labourers were at once ordered into the hold, and the hatches were securely fastened down, and by the time the canoes had reached the schooner she had every appearance of an ordinary trader.

The Nitendians swarmed up over the sides like so many monkeys, and soon the deck was crowded with noisy but good-humoured islanders, many of whom, however, proved to be old women ; indeed, if it be permissible to use the



expression, many of the canoes were entirely "manned" by old women.

The bargaining went forward briskly, the natives being highly satisfied with the complaisancy exhibited by the traders, and for a time no circumstance to arouse their suspicions occurred, Crudden being in no haste to act, because fresh canoes continued to put off from the shore.

When, however, quite a hundred and fifty natives had boarded the schooner, the signal was given, and the crew threw large pieces of stone ballast into the canoes. The islanders perceived that they were trapped and as many as were able sprang overboard, but a large number were rushed into the forecastle and secured.

The boat, which hung ready at the davits, was quickly afloat, and the work of capturing the swimmers proceeded; but there were so many that in the haste to stun them by striking them on the heads with the oars, many were either killed outright or severely wounded.

The boat returned several times to the schooner to place on board batches of captured islanders, and when at last the pursuit was abandoned and the boat returned for the last time, there was in the bottom several inches of water, turbid and crimson with the blood of many victims, and the sides and thwarts bore ghastly traces of the horrible deeds that had been done.

Nor was the tragedy yet complete. When the captured natives were marshalled on the deck, it was found that some were so seriously wounded that it was extremely doubtful whether they would recover.

"Here, some of you," cried Crudden; "trice up these niggers an' chuck 'em overboard. You were fools to bring lame ducks aboard at all."

And, to the disgrace of humanity, the crew, lead by Te Rangi, unhesitatingly obeyed the fiendish order, and

the poor wretches were bound hand and foot and cast into the sea to drown.

Mark and Harry, when they understood the recruiter's design, pleaded and remonstrated with Pugsley, and Pillinger refused to have anything to do with the brutal business; but the captain, who had fortified his nerves with some of Mr. Fergusson's whisky, obstinately declined to interfere with what he said was "the recruiter's business," and replied to the brothers' threats of exposure by saying:

"Now, look here, young fellers, you'd better stow that sort o' talk, or you'll be droppin' in for somethin' o' the same kind o' unpleasantness yerselves. An' as for you, Pillinger, when did you turn squeamish? I guess we'll have to break you all in afore long."

The significance of this threat did not occur to the brothers at the time, but they came to understand what it meant subsequently.

Several of the old women were found among the captured natives, and these also Crudden wished to murder in cold blood; but apparently the captain's dormant feelings had been to some extent aroused by the brothers' protestations, for he would not allow the women to be bound before they were thrown over the side. Still it is very doubtful whether the poor old creatures possessed sufficient strength to swim so far as the shore, so that even Crudden had not much ground for his complaints against the captain's "milk-sop meddlin'."

This treacherous deed added twenty-three to the occupants of the already crowded hold of the schooner, making Crudden rub his hands with glee at the prospect of so profitable a trip; but the very excess of success brought with it a corresponding fear that the vessel might be overhauled by a British man of war, though the knowledge that they had sent H.M.S. *Nautilus* southward

on a "punishing" expedition relieved the captain and Crudden of much of the anxiety they would otherwise have felt. Still they held several consultations as to the best course to pursue to avoid an inopportune inspection, and they decided to run for the Solomon Islands, where they hoped to meet with some trader from whom they would be able to obtain intelligence as to the movements of any vessels of the British navy that happened to be in those waters.

The recruiter was in favour of making a course direct for Mackay, but Pugsley objected that Mark and Harry would report to the colonial authorities the atrocities they had witnessed.

"What if they do?" queried Crudden contemptuously; "who'd believe 'em? That sort o' thing's bin reported so often, nobody takes no notice on it now."

"Well, I don't want such a thing said agin me," said Pugsley; "I've bin at the game a long time now, an' nobody's ever peached on me yet; but I b'lieve them blamed youngsters 'd do it in a minit."

"In ev'ry ship I was ever in afore I've allers bin able ter git ev'ry man's finger in the pie, so's they'd be afeard to peach; but," snarled Crudden, "haven't I tried agin an agin ter git them youngsters inter a scrimmage with the niggers; but they won't do no shootin' nor nothin'. Why, at Api, when they'd as near a squeak o' being cooked as ever they'll hev, they wouldn't p'int a gun, an' ever since they come aboard they've never lifted a hand to ketch a nigger."

"I know," assented Pugsley; "but we haven't tried the mutiny dodge on wi' 'em yet."

"Hang it all, cap'n; it ain't worth while to lose a lot o' niggers jest to stop them youngsters' mouths," remonstrated the recruiter.

"If we could make 'em b'lieve the niggers hed mutinied

an' was tryin' to take the schooner, surely they'd use their rifles to save their own lives. On'y a few niggers 'd be shot; we'd take care not to kill none, though we'd gammon to let drive inter the hold."

"Wouldn't it be best to put 'em ashore on one o' the Solomons?" suggested Crudden.

"By Jove, mate! the very notion! The boys made me agree to land 'em at Napuka. We'll put 'em ashore there right enough, an' I'm much mistaken if the niggers there don't save us any further bother."

"Couldn't we leave Pillinger there too? He's bin cuttin' up pretty rough lately, an' he'd peach in a minit if anythin' leaked out. Besides, we'd hev his share o' the head-money to the good."

"Well, mate, we'll see," replied Pugsley; "but it won't do to be too many men short when we git back, or there'll be trouble that way. We've a'ready lost two o' the crew, an' if Pillinger an' the boys go, some orkard questions may be asked."

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A HURRICANE.

IN pursuance of this plan the *Polly Hopkins* was headed due west, and, reckoning upon the continuance of the south-east trades, Pugsley expected to make the northern coast of San Christoval in about three days. This expectation was fully justified, for the commencement of the monsoon season was not due for quite two months, and such an event as a hurricane was far indeed from the captain's calculations.

Nevertheless, a hurricane was encountered, and a hurricane that left a trail of ruin to mark its course throughout the Solomon Islands, the Torres and Banks Groups, and to a diminishing extent to the New Hebrides, the westernmost of the Santa Cruz Islands also experiencing its force in a modified degree.

The morning of the second day after leaving Nitendi broke cloudless but hazy, and the wind fell until not a breath of air stirred the glassy surface of the ocean. Away about a mile on the port bow the swell broke with a dull monotonous sound on a coral reef, just awash at low water—one of the many dangers of navigation in these imperfectly surveyed seas.

Pugsley had sailed the Pacific too many years to be ignorant as to what these signs portended, even had not the rapid fall of the barometer from above thirty to twenty-eight inches warned him of the approaching storm.





"Lifting the vessel high towards the heavens."

*The Beachcombers*]

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Without loss of time, the schooner was made snug, only a close-reefed jib and a scrap of the foresail remaining set, and everything movable about the deck was secured.

The poor islanders were driven below and the hatches were closely battened down, the only means of ventilation for the hold being a small aperture in the forward bulk-head, across which strong battens were fixed. With a hundred and sixteen almost naked islanders cooped up in the narrow space afforded by the hold of the *Polly Hopkins*, in which, according to the colonial requirements, not more than sixty labourers should have been accommodated, the state of the atmosphere soon after the hatches were put on may be faintly imagined, but it can never be adequately conceived.

Soon after midday the swell perceptibly increased, the air, however, continuing absolutely still. As time passed on the disturbance of the sea became greater, until huge mountains of water rolled past with great speed, lifting the vessel high towards the heavens and then slipping from beneath her until she seemed about to sink far below the surface of the ocean.

The spray on the reef was hurled a hundred feet perpendicularly into the air, each roller bursting with a terrific roar as it encountered the obstacle. That strange phenomenon, a huge halo, surrounded the sun, and the absolute stillness of the atmosphere became increasingly oppressive.

Another hour passed, and a low moaning sound could be heard that seemed to come from no particular quarter, but was above, and beneath, and on all sides of the ship. Gradually this sound increased, and presently a thin blue-black line appeared on the horizon.

Faster and faster the dark line spread until half the heavens were enveloped, and as the inky blackness advanced across the sky, a foaming well of water swept



down upon the vessel, whose annihilation seemed inevitable.

The feeling of suppressed excitement grew as the climax approached, until the suspense became absolutely painful, dread being swallowed up in soul-stirred wonder and feverish expectancy.

The terrific grandeur of the scene surpasses all description; the almost midnight darkness following so suddenly upon the bright sunlight inspired the most hardened beholders with profound awe, as, grouped in sheltered corners, they awaited the fearful onslaught of the elements.

It came, and, fortunately for the *Polly Hopkins*, her head had during the calm gone round to the south, and luckily also she had ample sea room. For a moment the little vessel was literally buried under the rushing watery avalanche, but her buoyancy soon asserted itself, and as she gathered way she gradually relieved herself of her liquid incubus and raced through the boiling foam.

The noise was absolutely deafening; the wind shrieked through the rigging, and the turmoil of the waves created a hissing and a roaring that formed an awe-inspiring accompaniment to the terrific concert of the elements.

The staunch little schooner had not escaped unscathed; the cook's galley had disappeared, and with it had gone the pots in which the natives' rations were cooked; these in their course had carried away a large portion of the starboard bulwarks, and the only remnants of the starboard boat were the ringbolts which hung from the davits.

No lives had been lost among the officers and crew, for every one had in time retreated under cover, leaving the schooner with her helm lashed down to fly before the hurricane. And fly she did, for the whole of that night and until late on the following day, when the storm moderated and the schooner was hove to. Throughout another day the gale lasted, with short intervals of comparative

calm, and by the fourth morning the wind had once more settled back in the old quarter, and the *Polly Hopkins* was put upon a north-westerly course.

Then the hatch was removed, and the natives were ordered to come up on deck ; but for some time there was no response. The odour that arose from the hold was indescribably disgusting, so that no one could endure to approach the hatchway. Eventually a windsail was rigged, and after a current of fresh air had to some extent purified the atmosphere in the hold, a few emaciated islanders crept laboriously up the ladder and lay upon the deck gasping for breath and fainting from want of food and drink.

"My word! they're pretty bad, Crudden," cried Pugsley. "Take three or four men down and git the rest on 'em on deck."

Crudden accordingly ordered Mark, Harry, and Te Rangi to descend into the hold.

The scene below was unspeakably horrifying. On all sides lay the poor natives gasping and exhausted, for they had received neither food nor water since entering the hold before the hurricane commenced ; the violent motion of the vessel had made them dreadfully sea-sick, and, worse than all, the pestilential atmosphere, which, even with the hatch open and ventilated by the windsail, was nauseating, had rendered mere breathing difficult.

No time was lost in getting the miserable wretches on deck ; but the work had not gone on long when it became evident that to many of the natives the sudden transition to a pure, cool atmosphere would be fatal, so they were allowed to remain below ; for several the relief had arrived too late ; besides six, who were found to be dead, eleven succumbed when an attempt was made to arouse them.

"Here's a pretty go," cried Crudden with a volley of oaths, for he was enraged at the loss of so many labourers

and at the prospect of losing several more. "Send Jamaica down yer."

"What d'ye mean by leavin' the niggers all this time wi'out food an' water?" he demanded when the cook appeared.

"I cudn't 'elp it, Massa Crudden. De galley's kerried away, an' de niggers' kittles too, an' even 'f dey'd bin dar, 'ow cud I a cooked de stuff? An' 'f I'd a cooked it, 'ow'd I a got it inter de niggers wi' de 'atches on?"

"You should a put plenty o' yams an' water in the hold when the niggers went below," said Crudden.

"Nobody never tol' me to; an' 'ow was I ter know de blow'd las' so long?"

"There, get along on deck, an' get something ready for 'em as smart as ye can, or we'll be havin' some more on 'em peggin' out afore we know it."

A makeshift galley was soon rigged, and as quickly as possible a nourishing mess of pork and yams was prepared and given sparingly to the famishing natives, most of whom speedily recovered; but thirteen were unable to eat, and they gradually sank and died, while in many others the seeds of pulmonary disease, to which the islanders of the Pacific seem especially susceptible, were sown, to develop doubtless long ere the "thirty-nine moons" for which they were enslaved would elapse, and they would never more see their beautiful islands or return to their friends.

A circumstance connected with this ghastly tragedy seems especially significant of the manner in which work on the plantations destroyed the vitality of the islanders; of the seventeen returning labourers who remained on the vessel, thirteen succumbed to the hardships they suffered during the hurricane.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### AN EMEUTE.

WHEN an observation could be taken it was found that the *Polly Hopkins* had been carried nearly six hundred miles out of her course, and as the S.E. trades fell light, eight days elapsed before the schooner arrived off the coast of San Christoval, the southernmost of the Solomon Islands.

Generally a W.N.W. course was kept, Malayta, Guadalcanar, Florida, and Ysabel being visited on the way; but the natives were on the alert, and the recruiter's efforts were unattended with success until the vessel arrived off Bougainville, where the islanders are so bold and courageous that the labour traders seldom approach the place.

Pugsley, however, was determined to make up for the time and men lost in consequence of the hurricane, and when off the village of Belaga a large fleet of canoes surrounded the schooner, he enticed the natives to come aboard under the pretence of trading.

The usual course was then pursued; the canoes were swamped, as many as possible of the men on board were secured, and the recruiter in the boat picked many others out of the sea.

But Crudden became furious because a large number were escaping, and he fired again and again at the men in the water.

"Pull, you lubbers, pull!" he cried to the boat's crew,

in which were no longer included Mark and Harry, as it had been found that the brothers' exertions were invariably put forth to prevent the natives being captured or to enable them to escape.

The men rowed with a will, each islander landed in Queensland representing a clear gain of two shillings to every one of them, that being what was known as "head-money"; but in their eagerness to secure a "good catch," they again incurred the displeasure of the recruiter.

"What are ye up to now, ye fools?" Crudden exclaimed, as the boat was stopped to pick up an islander, who was swimming very slowly with one arm, having been wounded. "We're not goin' to bother about him. It's no use pickin' up wounded niggers, we'd on'y hev to throw 'em overboard agin"; and as the boat passed the swimmer, the recruiter struck him on the head with a boat-hook, and he sank.

The boat pursued the fugitives almost to the beach and returned to the vessel loaded down to the gunwales, and to Crudden's extreme gratification he found when he returned aboard that in all eighty men had been secured.

"Why, it's the best catch I ever had," he exclaimed; "an' I b'lieve they're all sound this time."

"Not quite all," responded Pugsley. "Yer confounded shootin' lies spoilt one or two o' them. Why can't you leave that rifle alone?"

"It don't matter s'long's we gets the niggers," replied Crudden exultingly.

"But how're we goin' to stow 'em?" queried the captain. "It's no use tryin' to pile 'em inter the hold; there won't be room for 'em to stan' up."

"Oh, yes, there will," responded the recruiter; "we can keep the tamest on 'em on deck till pretty late ev'ry night an' let 'em up soon's ever it's light in the mornin'. Them Bougainville devils'll hev to stop down altogether, an' Jamaica must keep 'em on pretty short commons, to knock

some o' the nonsense out on 'em ; 'twouldn't do to let them fellers on deck ; they'd think nothin' of massacrein' the lot of us."

The captain agreed that Crudden's plan was feasible, and, as there was obviously nothing to be gained by remaining longer in the neighbourhood, the schooner was headed for Napuka, where Mark and Harry were to be put ashore, and as the wind continued fair and the *Polly Hopkins* made good progress, Pugsley expected to reach that place on the third day after leaving Pelaga.

Before leaving Bougainville, however, Pugsley went through the farce of offering to land the four returning labourers on that island. These were the only ones remaining of the thirty shipped at Brisbane to be taken back to their homes, Koroko being among them.

"You're Solomon islanders," he said, "an' this is one o' the Solomons, so ashore you go ; we've got enough wi'out you."

But the poor fellows were terrified at the proposition, and begged to be allowed to remain on board, protesting that the Bougainville natives would kill and eat them, and they were constrained to re-engage to serve in Queensland to save themselves from the fate that awaited them if they were landed among their natural enemies.

When the Mallicolo men—who, as the "tamest niggers," had been allowed to remain on deck until ten o'clock—were sent below, the Bougainville natives attacked them, and the hold was soon a perfect pandemonium.

It happened to be Pillinger's watch, and he tried every expedient he could think of to quell the disturbance, but without avail, so he was obliged to call the captain, who at once summoned Crudden.

"We must shoot some o' the beggars if they won't be quiet," said the recruiter ; "but that's a fool's game s'long's there's a chance o' stoppin' the row wi'out it."

"What'll we do then?" inquired Pugsley anxiously.

"Let's see if a shot or two over their heads 'll frighten 'em," said Crudden, and he fired his revolver several times across the open hatchway.

It had the desired effect, for the natives, in dread of being shot, immediately shrank back from beneath the opening, and the animated mass became so closely packed that it was impossible to continue fighting.

The night passed without any renewal of the disturbance, but when the morning dawned and the Mallicolo men were allowed to ascend on deck, it was found that several of them were severely wounded, and down in the hold two of the Bougainville islanders—one of whom had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot\*—were dead.

"We're in bad luck, cap'n," remarked Crudden; "we're losin' the niggers a'most as fast's we're ketchin' 'em."

"Fact is, we've got too many aboard," replied Pugsley discontentedly.

"No fear. 'Twouldn't be reasonable to expect to land the entire hunderd an' sixty-six safe an' sound; but we oughter be able to git, say, a hundred an' fifty to Mackay."

"Not if they goes on fightin' like they did last night," returned Pugsley. "Look at them niggers," pointing to the wounded men.

"Yes, they're pretty bad. This 'un an' that 'un ain't worth keepin'," Crudden said as he kicked two of the natives. "They're about cooked. They must go overboard; it'd be on'y waste o' time to try an' doctor 'em."

The captain coincided in this brutal opinion, and soon afterwards there were two splashes and the attendant sharks quickly removed every trace of the cowardly crime.

A greater disturbance, however, occurred when the Mallicolo islanders were sent below that night, and one of

\* Whole tribes of these islanders exhibit this peculiarity.

the watch, noticing the reflection of a light in the hold, raised the alarm—

"Fire! Fire! The niggers 're setting fire to the ship!"

In a few moments every soul on board appeared on deck.

The captain and both the mates rushed to the hatchway and peered into the hold, but they were assailed immediately their heads appeared over the combings, and were knocked back on to the deck, the natives having armed themselves with battens wrenched from the berths, with which they struck at the heads that became plainly outlined to them against the starlit sky.

Pillinger was stunned, and lay for some time unconscious. Pugsley and Crudden soon picked themselves up, and, with greater caution, approached the hatchway.

To their horror they distinctly perceived a gleam of light below. The alarm that the natives were setting fire to the ship was well founded.

For some moments every one appeared panic-stricken; but Crudden, as he wached, noticed that the gleam was but transient—a mere flicker—so he gathered courage, and, remembering the barred opening in the forward bulkhead, ran down into the forecandle to ascertain what the natives were doing.

"They're fightin' like devils wi' the battens from the bunks," he reported to the captain when he returned on deck; "an' they must hev ripped up a bit o' the lower deck, for they're pitchin' the ballast, or cocoa-nuts, or somethin' o' that sort at one another. There won't be many of 'em alive by the morning if we don't quick put a stopper on 'em."

"But what's the meanin' o' that light you saw?" asked the captain.

"There's no light there now, but I see some sparks, that



makes me think some o' the niggers forrard is busy rubbin sticks to make fire."

"What do they want fire for?" asked Pugsley.

"I can't tell; but it's no good, whatever it is," replied Crudden. "Let's blaze inter 'em an' stop the'r little game," he cried, exasperated at the pain he suffered as well as at the danger of the situation.

"All right," assented the captain; "go an' get the rifles."

Crudden, calling to a couple of the crew, hurried into the cabin, and the three soon returned bearing the arms, which were served out to all hands, and a supply of ammunition was placed on the cabin table, to which the men helped themselves.

While these preparations were being made Pugsley had gone down to watch the natives through the bulkhead; but he instantly rushed on deck shouting:

"The beggars hev got some rope alight, an' they're tryin' to set fire to the deck. Shoot 'em! Kill ev'ry one on 'em!" and seizing a rifle from one of the crew he fired into the hold.

For a moment the fighting among the islanders, that had hitherto continued without intermission, was suspended, as the Mallicolo men beneath the hatchway sought to get under cover; but the light afforded by the burning rope enabled the Bougainville islanders to more clearly distinguish their antagonists, and they recommenced the attack with greater ferocity than ever.

The captain's example was immediately followed by Crudden and the crew, only Pillinger, Mark, and Harry remaining inactive, the former being still dazed by the blow he had received, and the brothers were horrified at the butchery that was going on, but they knew it would be futile to interpose.

"Let 'em have it," cried Crudden as he fired; "that's the way to pop 'em off."

"Pick off the Bougainville niggers if you can," commanded Pugsley; "they're the cause of all the bother."

Soon after the firing commenced the fighting in the hold ceased; but the islanders began throwing pieces of ballast up through the hatchway and knocking aside the rifles as they projected over the combings.

One piece of stone struck Crudden a severe blow in the face, increasing his rage to an ungovernable pitch; and as he cast about to discover the means to more readily compass his vengeance, he noticed for the first time that Mark and Harry were taking no part in the fighting.

"Now then, you skulkers," he exclaimed with an oath; "why ain't you helpin' to defend the vessel agen mutiny?"

"There's no mutiny," replied Mark.

"The niggers'll take the ship if we don't settle 'em, an' ev'ry man aboard must hev a hand in this affair. We're not agoin' to hev no spies an' informers. You shoot, or I'll shoot you."

"I recommend you to be careful," exclaimed Mark; "two can play at that game. I won't fire at the natives, but if you attempt to point your rifle at me I'll not hesitate to shoot you."

"And remember you'll have to reckon with me also, if you attack my brother," cried Harry boldly.

"Here, cap'n," bawled Crudden; "here's these softies o' yourn won't do any shootin'. They're playing spies, an' if you don't make 'em do some o' the shootin' they'll spin a fine yarn when they gets ashore about the goin's on aboard the *Polly Hopkins*."

But at that moment a cocoa-nut thrown from the hold struck Pugsley on the head and knocked him into the lee scuppers, where he lay senseless, and Crudden had to turn his attention to the hatchway, for the natives, taking advantage of the temporary stoppage of the firing, were trying to climb the ladder to get on deck.

The fact is, the crew even were tired of the murderous work, and would gladly have stopped. They fully appreciated that every native killed represented a loss of two shillings to each of them, and as all danger from fire seemed at an end, and as the men had not been much hurt by the missiles thrown from the hold, they entertained little animosity against the islanders.

Crudden, however, seemed mad with rage, and rushing to the hatchway with clubbed rifle, struck savagely at the head of a native that had just risen above the combings. The weapon descended upon the unfortunate islander's skull with a sickening crash, and the body fell back carrying with it the other natives on the ladder.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A BRUTAL MASSACRE.

THE danger of the ship being set on fire—if it ever existed—had long ceased, for the natives, finding that the burning rope afforded their enemies light and enabled them to aim, had extinguished the flame, and after the native had been killed on the ladder they all huddled as closely as possible into the corners of the hold and remained perfectly quiet.

But it seemed to Crudden that their very quietness implied some sinister design, and having swung a lantern down the hatchway he ordered the men to re-commence firing. There were, however, few islanders to be seen to aim at, for so many had been slaughtered that the remainder were able to keep out of the line of fire.

"Come along, some of you," the recruiter shouted; "come an' fire through the forrad bulkhead."

Te Rangi and two of the Loyalty islanders obeyed Crudden's order, leaving Jim, Patsy, and Jamaica and the other Loyalty men to guard the hatchway, and soon the natives in the aft corners of the hold were subjected to a murderous fire.

The islanders, seeing no other way of escape, naturally made a rush for the ladder, and the watch there having been somewhat relaxed, Jim and Patsy were knocked down and would have fared badly had not Mark and Harry dashed forward to their rescue.

Mark warded off a blow aimed with a batten at Patsy, and with a vigorous push threw the islander against the bulwarks. Harry at the same moment wrenched the batten from another native and, tripping him up, sent him sprawling on the deck.

Jim and Patsy had by this time regained their feet, and they would have taken summary vengeance upon the natives, but the brothers interposed.

"Leave them alone," cried Mark; "they're only fighting for their lives."

"An' ain't I ter fight fer mine?" demanded Jim.

"Yes, when it's in danger," retorted Mark; "these poor fellows won't harm you, if you leave them alone."

"Faith, I b'lieve ye'r roight," said Patsy; "the poor devils hes hed ev'ry bit o' fight claan knocked out of 'em."

"Well, then," pleaded Harry, "let them stay on deck. We'll see that they don't get up to any mischief."

"An' ye'll be answerable to Crudden for 'em?" asked Patsy.

"We will," replied Harry.

And so it was arranged, the poor islanders evidently understanding what was going on, for they came forward, and crouching on the deck clasped the brothers' knees, at the same time looking appealingly from one to the other, and saying something in their own language.

Six were rescued in this way, and afterwards others were allowed to steal on deck, until nearly forty had escaped from the hold, and had huddled together in the deep shadow of the bulwarks, Crudden being unaware of what was going on, for the ladder was screened by a row of berths from observation from the point where he stood firing.

The shooting through the forward bulkhead continued for an hour or more, but stopped at last as no natives could be seen to aim at. Still Crudden was not satisfied.

The majority of the Bougainville natives had sought refuge forward, and consequently they had remained comparatively safe from both the firing down the hatchway and through the opening in the bulkhead.

"Bring an augur aft here," shouted the recruiter as he rushed along the deck, and going below he bored several holes in the aft bulkhead, whence he and his companions were able to fire into the midst of the Solomon islanders.

A fearful din immediately arose, as a rush was made aft, the natives smashing the lantern with a batten and plunging the hold in darkness.

Again and again a lantern was lowered, only to be instantly dashed to pieces, and eventually the attempt was abandoned, and the aimless firing was resumed and continued until the day broke, when on peering into the hold it seemed to Crudden that almost all the islanders had been shot.

It needed no second order to induce the men to cease firing, and then Crudden bawled down the hatchway, commanding the islanders to come on deck.

For some time there was no response, but after much hesitation, when the natives found that the shooting had stopped altogether, one after another peeped timidly forth, and at last ventured to climb on deck.

But how small a number came up!

Of the hundred and sixty-two who had entered the hold the previous night, only seventy-three mustered in the morning, including those who had escaped up the hatchway through the connivance of Mark and Harry; and almost every man bore marks of the affray.

"Here, Jim and Patsy," ordered Crudden, when he found that no more islanders were coming on deck; "go below an' sling up some o' them niggers, an' rope's-end any as gammons to be wounded."

A boom was rigged, and one by one the wounded

natives were hoisted up, until thirty-five had been laid upon the deck.

"That's the lot," cried Jim from below.

"What's become o' the rest then?" asked Crudden.

"If it's the dead 'uns ye mane," said Patsy, "sure there's plinty of 'em forninst us."

"Sling the carcasses up then," shouted Crudden with an oath.

Once more the block and tackle were set in motion, and slung together by threes and fours, the bodies were hauled up out of the hold, to be at once dropped overboard without even a momentary examination to ascertain whether they were quite dead, though Harry protested that he saw several of them moving and struggling after they were in the sea.

"It's a vile crime," he exclaimed; "some of those natives are only stunned; they revive as soon as the water touches them."

"All right, Softie," retorted Crudden; "we'll give 'em plenty of water then."

"But, men," cried Harry, appealing to the crew; "surely you don't want to murder those poor helpless islanders?"

"Just you shut up, or I'll see if I can't make you," shouted Crudden angrily. "Some o' them beggars fought an' killed one another, an' then th' others mutinied an' hed to be shot. They deserve to be dead, an' we'll treat 'em as if they were dead."

So the ghastly work went on to its disgraceful end, which arrived when the bodies of fifty-four natives had been cast overboard.

Up to this time Crudden had practically had command of the vessel, for Pugsley had been obliged by the injury he had sustained to retire to his cabin, and Pillinger had not yet recovered from the blow he had received early in the disturbance.

At this moment, however, the captain appeared on the deck, looking very ill and with his head bandaged.

"All quiet now, Crudden?" he asked.

"Yes, cap'n. I've got 'em all up outer the hold. Fifty-four dead 'uns has bin slung overboard, an' there's the damaged niggers," the recruiter said, pointing to the men laid upon the deck. "What'r we to do wi' 'em?"

"Oh, chuck 'em over the side too, an' make a job of it," growled the captain, his features twitching with the pain of his wound.

"Hang it!" cried Crudden, "we've lost enough as it is. We can't afford to throw away all our niggers; some on 'em may be worth keepin'."

"Well, you look 'em through, an' keep as many as you like. My head's so bad I can hardly stand."

Crudden called Te Rangi to his assistance, and proceeded with brutal nonchalance to make his selection among the wounded islanders. The two men roughly dragged the suffering natives about, and examined the extent of their injuries in the most pitiless manner, probing bullet wounds with their clasp knives and twisting limbs to discover broken bones. A cry of pain was the signal for immediate condemnation, its utterer being without further delay thrown upon the heap of seriously injured.

"There's twelve good enough to keep," reported Crudden to Pugsley, when the examination had been completed.

"Are you sure they'll get round?" inquired the captain.

"Of course I can't be sure, but they ought to. Most on em ain't much hurt."

"Well, sling the rest into the sea," ordered the captain savagely.

"Mr. Pugsley, think of what you are doing," gravely remonstrated Mark Derrison, who with Harry had confronted the captain, for the brothers felt that they could



not, at whatever cost to themselves, stand passively by to see the poor wounded natives thrown overboard.

"Think, Mr. Pugsley, of the terrible crime you propose to commit," continued Mark.

"I'm capt'n o' this ship," shouted Pugsley, his pale face growing purple with passion; "an' I've a right to punish mutineers. Ev'ry one o' them niggers oughter be shot; but I'm merciful, an' I'll spare them as 'as a chance o' gettin' well. As for th' others, well, I'll be merciful to them too, an' put 'em outer the'r mis'ry, for Crudden says they can't live. A quick death's better'n lingerin' suff'rin'."

"It's murder, nevertheless, to hasten the death of any human being," persisted Mark.

"Look you here, youngster," bawled Pugsley, more than ever enraged at the brothers' opposition; "I didn't bring you aboard this ship to lecture me afore my crew. If you say another word I'll hev ev'ry one o' them niggers hev overboard, an' I'll clap you an' yer brother ashore at the very next land we sight."

Mark attached little importance to Pugsley's threat so far as it concerned his brother and himself, but he felt that any further remonstrance would sacrifice the lives of the wounded natives whom Crudden had decided should be allowed a chance to recover, so he very reluctantly abandoned the other poor islanders to their terrible fate.

No time was lost, nor any ceremony observed, beyond tying the hands and feet of the less seriously injured, and the twenty-three kanakas were thrown over the side, where by this time the sea was thronged with sharks, and in a few moments no trace remained of the horrible tragedy that had just been enacted, except many patches of ensanguined water.

The hold was cleaned and whitewashed, and the bullet marks were filled up, so that an inspection of the vessel should not reveal the atrocities that had been committed.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### NAPUKA AGAIN.

THE day after the tragedy related in the previous chapters, another of the Solomon Islands was sighted, which, to his unbounded joy, Koroko recognised as his home, and he hastened to acquaint Harry of the fact, and to thank him for inducing the captain to return him to his birthplace.

"You must not thank me," protested Harry; "I have had nothing to do with it."

"This fellow him place all same," rejoined Koroko, evidently still of the opinion that Harry was in some way responsible for the schooner's course being directed thither.

"Well, Koroko, I'm glad you're so near home again; but I do not think Crudden will let you land if he can help it. If you take my advice, you will not let any one know that this is your island, but take the first chance to slip overboard and swim for the shore."

Koroko understood, and gazing wistfully at the land he said: "This fellow gammon plenty sleep; bymby everybody kaikai (dinner), this fellow plenty swim."

"Be very careful you are not seen," said Harry; "for Crudden will not hesitate to shoot you if you give him the chance."

Harry then walked aft, and seeing Pillinger seated near the skylight, his head being still affected by the blow he had sustained, asked him: "What place is this we are making?"

"Why, boy, that's the place you were so wild to be landed at when you came aboard—that's Napuka. Your uncle's station's roun' the other side. I guess you think different about it now, don't you? You don't want to be put ashore now?"

"What! Is that Napuka?"

"Yes, lad, it's nowhere else."

"And is the captain going to land us there?"

"That's just what he is goin' to do. He wants to get rid o' you, an' he don't 'zackly keer to murder you straight, so he means to land you there an' leave you to be killed an' eat by the niggers."

"We'll take our chance of that. I'd rather be landed there than remain aboard this slave ship."

"Hush, lad! It's no use makin' a row; it on'y makes things onpleasant."

"What do you intend to do? You haven't mixed yourself up with the cruelties of those brutes, Pugsley and Crudden; but if ever we get back to Queensland, we shall certainly report what we know."

"Oh, don't bother me. I don't know what to do. My head's fairly splittin' tryin' to shape a course."

"You ought to make a report to the authorities directly you get back. That's your only safe course."

"What! Turn an' peach on my mates!" exclaimed Pillinger indignantly. "Not if I knows it. I've done some things in my time I ain't extry proud about, but I never did nothin' mean like that."

"It is not mean or dishonourable to bring such miscreants as Pugsley and Crudden to justice. For the honour of the British flag and for the safety of honest traders in these seas, such atrocities as we have witnessed should be stopped, and the men who commit them punished; and every man who has it in his power should heartily assist in putting an end to the vile traffic in

human life that now goes on under the Union Jack and with the countenance of the Imperial and Colonial authorities."

"It may be all you say, an' I daresay it is ; but I ain't the man to roun' on my mates."

Nor could any of Harry's arguments shake Pillinger's resolution. He entertained a steadfast though distorted idea of the obligation he was under to be loyal to his shipmates, which no consideration of personal danger or abhorrence of those shipmates' deeds could move.

Harry, therefore, left him unconvinced, and proceeded to acquaint Mark of their approach to Napuka.

"What do you think, Mark?" he said in an undertone. "Koroko is a Napukan."

"And what of that, Harry?"

"Why, he may be of great assistance to us when we get ashore."

"So he may, if he ever gets ashore himself," assented Mark doubtfully.

"Oh, he means to drop overboard and swim for it," said Harry.

"That's about the only way he'll get there, for Crudden will never allow him to land if he can help it. Have you told him that we are going ashore there?"

"No; I didn't know it was Napuka when I was speaking to him."

"Well, cut along and tell him, but be sure and do it on the quiet. He may have a chance of slipping overboard during the night, if Pugsley will keep the vessel there until the morning."

So Harry went in search of the Solomon islander, and after some trouble found him in one of the berths in the hold pretending to be asleep, though it must have taxed the poor fellow's power of self-control to be so near his native place and yet to refrain from gazing upon it as the

schooner made the land. Probably Koroko distrusted himself, and remained below to conceal his anxiety and impatience.

The native's plan of operations was greatly simplified when he heard that the captain was going to land Mark and Harry at Napuka, and that the vessel would probably remain there until the following morning; but Koroko resolved to avail himself of the first favourable opportunity, and not to trust to the schooner being detained all night, because he knew that it might occur to Crudden to order the hatch to be put on, and then all hope of escape would be gone.

Gradually the outlines of the coast became clearer, and by noon the *Polly Hopkins* arrived off the opening in the reef opposite Napuka, through which, however, the vessel could not pass until the tide served. But Pugsley did not wait for the turn of the tide; he ordered the boat out at once, saying to Mark and Harry—

"Look alive, youngsters, and get your traps together. I can't afford to stop long. We must get out o' this afore sundown."

"Won't you remain for a couple of days to take us back to Queensland?" asked Mark, with a view to afford Koroko an opportunity of escape rather than with any idea that the captain would allow them to return with him.

"No, I'm blessed if I do," replied Pugsley decisively; "I s'pose you don't 'zackly care about gettin' dropt down among sich cannibals as you've bin seein' lately."

"Remember, Mr. Pugsley, it's ten pounds for landing us, but a hundred if you will wait a few days and take us back with you," urged Mark.

"I wouldn't stop if you'd give me a thousand," said the captain. "I've had 'bout enough o' yer spyin' an' pryin'. I ain't afeared o' yer peachin' once you git ashore over there."

"Will you wait until the morning for ten pounds more?" inquired Harry. "We don't want to return with you, but we may require some different sorts of 'trade' to those we have brought."

Harry, however, was somewhat disconcerted when Pugsley replied:

"Well, youngster, I'm not above makin' an honest tinner by hangin' around for a few hours; but I ain't agoin' to run inter the lagoon. Them blamed niggers 'd be up to some divilment 'f I did. "I'll stan' out an' put back by daybreak. That'll about do you, I guess."

Harry had no option but to assent to this arrangement, though it sadly marred his generous scheme; but he trusted that Pugsley would not stand far out, and he was confident that if Koroko could slip into the water without being discovered he would be able to swim ashore.

By the time the brothers brought their chests and other impedimenta on deck, the boat had been got ready and brought alongside, and after bidding Pillinger farewell, Mark and Harry took their places in her and were soon on their way to the shore.

The brothers had looked into Mr. Fergusson's cabin for the purpose of saying "Good-bye" to the Government agent; but they found the unfortunate man in a paroxysm of delirium, the result of incessant drinking, the captain having kept him supplied with whisky ever since the schooner had been among the islands.

The agent should have had a place in the boat on every occasion when islanders were recruited; but, as a matter of fact, he had never stepped over the ship's side; indeed, it is doubtful whether he was aware that the boat had ever been in the water or that a single "recruit" had been obtained. Yet it would be his duty, before the natives could be landed in Queensland, to certify that the islanders had voluntarily consented to go aboard the vessel, and

that they perfectly understood the terms of the agreement under which they were to serve on the sugar plantations of the colony.

It has been urged that this is "the weak point" of the Polynesian labour traffic, and that drunken and untrustworthy agents are exceptions to the general rule. On the contrary, this is only one of a legion of weak points—the system itself is utterly wrong and immoral, whether lawful or unlawful—and, though all agents are not drunkards, many of them "stand in" and take a share of the "head-money," so that they are pecuniarily interested in the success of the trip, and are, therefore, not disposed to be hypercritical as to the methods adopted by the recruiter.

Though the *Polly Hopkins* was brought up directly opposite the entrance to Napuka, not a solitary canoe had put off from the shore, nor even had a native been seen on the beach. When, however, the boat approached the opening, one after another dusky form came from among the jungle, and before the brothers could land fully two hundred tall, handsome, but savage-looking natives had assembled on the sands.

They watched the approach of the boat with evident interest, though Mark and Harry were scarcely reassured by the threatening gestures they observed some of the islanders indulge in. Brave, however, in their honesty of purpose, they did not hesitate to spring ashore immediately Crudden had backed the boat far enough in, and, as the natives perceived the large chests and other articles that were subsequently landed, their eyes glistened with covetousness, which Crudden observed, and he exclaimed sardonically—

"It won't be long afore the youngsters are settled in comfortable quarters."

Conspicuous among the dark, almost naked islanders stood a dejected-looking white, or rather whitey-brown,

man, clothed in trousers and shirt and a straw hat, who, when Mark and Harry had got all their goods ashore and the boat was being pushed off to return to the schooner, stepped forward and greeted the brothers :

"Waal, strangers," he said; "what sort's yer little crank? Are yer traders, er what are yer anyhow?"

"No, we are not traders," answered Mark; "but before we explain what has brought us here, will you tell the natives to get under cover, or that man in the boat will, I feel certain, shoot some of them as soon as he has got out of range of their arrows."

"Oh, that's his dee-scription, is it!" exclaimed the man, and appreciating the situation he addressed a few rapid words to an old chief, and the islanders disappeared as if by magic.

"I guess we'd better make tracks also," suggested the man; "it's not healthy ter be foolin' around here; thet amiable cuss may happen ter take a fancy ter draw a bead on us in dee-fault o' the nigs," and without awaiting the brothers' assent he led the way towards a rough but strongly-built house on the left of the village.

Mark and Harry followed, carrying with them all their belongings except the chests, that were left upon the beach.

"Waal, strangers," said the man when they had entered the house, "I allow yer've tickled my gumption ter make out what in the name o' the loonatic universe hes made yer fetch this doggone location."

"Is this Captain Birtle's store?" inquired Mark, instead of immediately satisfying the man's "tickled gumption."

"I don't know. Ask me another," replied the man solemnly winking.

"Isn't this Napuka?" asked Harry, taking their quaint friend's request literally, though the man evidently intended to imply his doubt concerning Captain Birtle's existence.



"Thet's about it ; ole Birara over thar calls this city of his Napuka."

"Then this must be Uncle Richard's store," exclaimed Harry.

The man expressed his astonishment by a long diminuendo whistle, and exclaimed—"Jee-ru-sa-lem ! Here's a couple more ! why, sakes alive ! It's just rainin' Birtle's nevvys. Yer must a sprung from a durned prolific stock."

Mark glanced at Harry, and Harry looked meaningly back at Mark.

"Has some one else been here lately representing himself as Captain Birtle's nephew ?" asked Mark.

"That is so, boss."

"A short man, with a grey beard, grey hair, and sallow, wrinkled complexion ?"

"Yer've just about painted the picture o' one of 'em."

"One of them ? Why, were there several ?"

"Thar was two."

"How long is it since they were here ?" inquired Mark anxiously.

"Neow, pardners, don't it kinder strike yer thet yer cross-questionin' Judd Gridley a durned sight more'n's perlite ? An' yer've never so much as satisfied my natteral curiosity."

The brothers again exchanged glances, and recognising that the storekeeper would be a most valuable ally if he could be enlisted—that, in fact, it would be almost impossible to proceed without his assistance—and being very favourably impressed with the man's manner, Mark replied good-humouredly :

"Well, perhaps, after all, Mr. Gridley, if we tell you what has brought us here, it will be the quickest way of learning what we want to know."

"Thet is so, mister. Let me just know who yer are an'

what yer up to, an' likely's not I'll be able ter tell yer suthin."

Mark accordingly, having received an approving nod from Harry, recounted unreservedly what had happened from the opening of Captain Birtle's mysterious packet down to the moment of their landing at Napuka, fully convincing the storekeeper that they were, according to his description, "Cap'n Birtle's gen-u-wine, A number one, eighteen carat nevvys."

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A VALUABLE ALLY.

"THEY Snape's about the durnedest mean cuss I ever h'ard tell of," exclaimed Judd Gridley when Mark had finished his narration.

"How long is it since he was here?" asked Harry.

"Waal, let's reckon. It's near upon three weeks. He kem ashore here as bold as a buffalo, an' orders me aroun' like's I was a reg'ment o' niggers. But I dee-monstrated ter him pretty slick the kinder coon he had ter trade with, an' he toned down just considerable."

"What did he want you to do?" inquired Mark.

"He wanted ter hev the run o' the store right away; an' I hed ter inti-mate thet he'd hev ter claar or there'd be trouble, an' so, mister, he went somewhar south, can't 'zackly locate whar."

"Then he has not gone away from the island yet?" exclaimed Harry excitedly.

"I calc'late not, boss. He'd scarcely take that chunky little brig o' hisn through any o' the openin's 'cept the one right here."

"Then we'll catch the vagabond and denounce him," cried Mark.

"Ketchin's right enough, mister; but as fer dee-nouncin', I reckon it won't be no partic'lar use dee-nouncin' the critter ter me. I ain't a jedge in this yer kentry; an' I guess Birara won't arbitrate, 'less he happens ter take a notion ter eat one o' yer."

"At any rate, we are here in time to spoil his deeply-laid scheme," said Mark. "We must go down the coast and find the place Uncle Richard described."

"See here, pardners," said Gridley; "I reckon I kin be useful ter yer some; I kin spot that location right away. But I'll be straight wi' yer; yer must give us what I've h'ard called a 'quid proko,' an' thet don't mean a quid o' bacca nor yet a British suv'rin; but let's say five hundred American dollars. Is it agreed?"

"Yes," replied Mark; "we will gladly close with your offer, and will give you five hundred dollars provided we secure our uncle's secreted money; but if we fail we may have to work our passages back to Australia; that is, if we ever have the chance."

"We'll reckon it settled then," rejoined Gridley. "I don't want no pay 'less the claim pans out the dust but we'd better make a start by totin' yer boxes inter the store. 'Twon't pay ter expose 'em much longer on the beach below, or Birara 'll be thinking o' annexing' em."

Acting upon the storekeeper's suggestion, the chests were "toted" up to the store, and the council was resumed as to the course to be followed to checkmate Snape, who certainly was first in the field.

Gridley advised that they should take a canoe early the following morning and go down the coast to Kanaputa, where the cave was situated, and the brothers agreed that the proposal exactly met their wishes.

"We must 'suar' Birara the first thing, or he'll just turn rusty an' ree-fuse ter let his niggers paddle us down thar."

"What shall we give him?" asked Harry.

"What hev yer got?"

"Oh, different sorts of 'trade,'" replied Harry.

"Hev yer got 'bacca?"

"Yes."

"Then that's about the c'rect ticket. The store's run out o' bacca, consequently it's quotin' at er consid'able pre-my-um on the Napuka market at the present moment."

"Perhaps it would be as well to get some more tobacco from the schooner when she puts in to-morrow morning," suggested Harry. "We've got to give Pugsley that ten pounds if he comes for it, and a good supply of tobacco may be worth more than it will cost us and the ten pounds into the bargain."

"Yer couldn't do better, pardners," said Gridley. "If yer friends afloat on'y dropt ter it, they could trade 'bacca fer niggers on 'ceptionally fav'able terms just neow."

An intimation was accordingly conveyed to Birara that the strangers who had just landed desired to make the acquaintance of the great chief, and to beg his acceptance of a present.

A favourable response was received, and the brothers, accompanied by Gridley to act as interpreter, soon found themselves in the presence of a tall, handsome old Solomon islander.

He greeted the brothers very cordially, and graciously accepted a liberal gift of tobacco, which afforded him such evident pleasure that Mark felt no hesitation in preferring the request for the loan of a canoe and the services of a crew.

The request was readily granted, and after a short and unimportant interview, Birara, with a dignified wave of the hand, closed the audience and retired to enjoy a portion of his visitors' tribute.

"He's not such a bad sort when yer don't rub his fur the wrong way," remarked Gridley as soon as they had left the old chief's presence. "The on'y trouble I hev with him is he's so durned suspicious; he kinder mistrusts everybody all the time."

"Well, I don't wonder at it," said Harry. "When

you remember the class of white scoundrels who infests these beautiful islands, and make their livings by deceiving the natives, it is not surprising that there are outrages committed against the traders, and that the missionaries are massacred."

"That's so; but Birara here mistrusts everybody—me, you, on' everybody else."

"Perhaps he has had good cause to," rejoined Harry. "I should say there are very few natives on the whole of the islands of the Western Pacific who have not had a friend or a relative kidnapped or killed by the labour traders."

"Thar's a new an' kinder improved style o' thet business kerried on hereabouts just neow," remarked Gridley. "The labour traders used ter reckon dead niggers as so much clear loss, but they're gettin' mighty cute, an' neow they totes the nigs heads ter the northern islan's an' trades 'em off fer live niggers. How's that fer tarnation keen biz.?"

"It's a degrading business," exclaimed Mark indignantly.

"Well, thet's so; but we can't help it, so I guess there's no use in worritin' over it," said Gridley in a tone intended to dismiss the subject.

"How long will it take to get to Kanaputa, Mr. Gridley?" asked Harry.

"Oh, somewhar about a couple of hours. If we start soon after sunup we'll hev plenty o' time ter prospect the en-tire claim an' be back afore sundown, though I reckon thet cuss Snape hes bottomed it afore neow."

"Yes, I'm afraid our journey will be fruitless," despondently admitted Mark. "Uncle Richard's instructions were so clear and precise that Snape cannot have failed to find the money. It surprises me that he has not put it aboard his vessel and got away before now."

"I reckon he's kinder greedy, an' he's tryin' his hand at the wreck," remarked the storekeeper. "He's just the dee-scription o' critter as'd wanten clean scoop the pool an' leave nothin' behind him fer nobody."

And so they continued discussing the matter from different points of view till they "turned in" for the night.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE TREASURE SEEKERS.

LONG before sunrise—or “sunup” as he called it—Gridley aroused the brothers and, after partaking of a hearty meal, the party went on to the beach to complete the preparations for their excursion down the coast.

Looking out to sea Harry espied the *Polly Hopkins* in the offing slowly making for the entrance, for the wind was light. The sight of the schooner recalled Koroko to the brothers' thoughts, and they reproached themselves for having, in the excitement of getting ashore and planning to checkmate Snape, entirely forgotten the unfortunate islander.

“I wonder whether he has escaped,” said Harry anxiously.

“He should have found an opportunity of slipping overboard during the night,” observed Mark; “the length of the swim does not signify much to a native if he be not chased and so obliged to exhaust his strength.”

“I never expected Pugsley would put out to sea; I thought he would stand off and on along the coast,” remarked Harry.

“Well, we must give him the ten pounds,” said Mark, “and hope that it hasn't been expended in vain.”

Before long the schooner arrived off the entrance and a boat put off from her, Captain Pugsley himself steering. The boat very cautiously approached the beach, for the



natives had again congregated and were making a rather hostile demonstration.

Gridley, however, assured Birara of the pacific intentions of the visitors, and the men were unmolested as the boat backed slowly in.

"Well, youngsters," said Pugsley, "how do you like yer new quarters? They ain't as comfortable as you hed aboard, I 'spect, if they is more select."

"We are very well satisfied, thank you," replied Mark. "We find that we can do with some more tobacco—trade tobacco—than we have brought. Can you let us have some?"

"Yes; I think I can let you hev a box. It'll cost you three poun's."

"Very well," replied Mark; "bring it ashore as soon as you can, and we will give you thirteen pounds altogether."

Pugsley accordingly put off again to the schooner and returned with the box of tobacco, which being landed, Mark handed the money to the captain, saying:

"There's your money, Mr. Pugsley, as agreed; and now we'll bid you 'good-day.' You'd better not come ashore, as the natives have formed a bad opinion of your vessel."

"Well, good-bye, youngster," responded Pugsley; "I don't want to see no more o' you, an' I don't 'spect I ever shall; but I will say you've acted fair an' square wi' me, an' I'm sorry yer so precious techy 'bout a few niggers."

"It is a vile business you are engaged in, and I warn you," exclaimed Mark, "that if ever my brother or I return to Australia a report of the atrocities committed by you and your men will be made to the colonial authorities."

"I ain't a bit afeard," rejoined Pugsley. "Them sort

o' reports has bin made over an' over agin. Nobody takes no notice on 'em. It ain't worth the Gov'ment's while to offend the planters an' squatters. It's a'ready known well enough in the colonies that ev'ry labour ship hes to ketch the niggers as best they can. Kidnappin's just winked at, so you may save yerselves the trouble o' reportin' me."

The boat then returned to the ship, and the preparations for the trip to Kanaputa having been completed, the brothers and Gridley took their places in the canoe and went southward along the coast.

After two hours' easy paddling, the party passed under the immense natural arch and entered the landlocked haven that had so favourably impressed Captain Birtle, and there they found the brig in which Snape had made the voyage to the islands. She was lying at anchor near the southern entrance to the little haven, those aboard being apparently confident that she was securely hidden, for vessels visiting the islands seldom venture to drop anchor for fear of being surprised by hostile natives.

"What do yer reckon ter do neow?" inquired the store-keeper.

"Go aboard and confront the rascal," replied Mark.

"I guess that'd be the way ter make that cuss Snape kinder sit up just, but I don't calc'late yer'd pocket much fer yer trouble."

"What do you advise then?" inquired Mark.

"Waal, mister, I'd advise yer to see first whether that blamed critter hes sprung yer uncle's plant, an' then, if he hes, plot an' plot till yer kin git it back from him."

"But if he has been here three weeks he must have the money," interposed Harry. "It wouldn't take three hours to get it all aboard."

"Still, I'd advise yer ter make sartin," persisted Gridley. "Yer can't call a man a thief till yer sartin sure he's took suthin'."

"I agree with Mr. Gridley," said Mark. "It won't take long to search the cave, and perhaps we'll take the rogue red-handed."

So the canoe was directed towards the narrow strip of beach, keeping well under the shadow of the cliffs, though that precaution scarcely appeared necessary, for the watch aboard the *Taniwha*, as the brig was named, was so negligent that the entrance of the canoe into the bay had not been observed.

The objections on the part of the natives to approach the beach were as strong as in Captain Birtle's time, but liberal promises of sticks of tobacco again overcame their superstitious alarm, and eventually the party landed and the canoe was hidden behind a rocky projection.

"Now we've merely to follow up this stream to find the place where the money was hidden," said Mark. "I distinctly recollect uncle Richard's instructions. Just round that point we'll come to the entrance to the cave."

"Sure enough, it's right there," exclaimed Gridley as they came in sight of the mouth of the cavern.

"And when we enter we shall have to go a couple of hundred yards before we come to the tunnel out of which the stream flows," continued Mark, gratified to find his memory serving him so well.

"But where is the stream?" inquired Harry.

By this time they were standing at the entrance to the cave, Harry carrying a bundle of torches and Mark and Gridley having their rifles.

"Well, that is strange," exclaimed Mark; "it ought to be running just where we stand. There is water lower down, but this seems perfectly dry."

"Thar's bin nary drop o' water down yer this many a day," said the storekeeper; "though we're standin' in the old bed o' the creek. Thet water below thar runs up wi' the tide and then drains back."

"Perhaps Snape's diverted the stream," suggested Mark.

"This place's bin dry more'n three weeks," rejoined Gridley; "'sides, what'd he want'er dam the creek fer?"

"Perhaps we shall discover the reason when we have explored the cave," said Harry.

"That's the talk, boss," exclaimed the storekeeper; "let's go ahead."

They accordingly entered the cavern, and soon the darkness compelled them to light one of the torches, when they encountered the aimless onslaught of the swarms of startled birds and bats. Following up the bed of the stream they came to the mouth of the tunnel out of which the water had formerly gushed, but now it was perfectly dry.

Harry, bearing the torch, led the way and, bending low, crept slowly forward, the others following close behind him. When about a hundred yards of the tunnel had been traversed Harry uttered an exclamation of surprise, and, stopping, picked up a leathern pocket-book.

"Someone has evidently been along this way lately," he exclaimed. "Look, here's a pocket-book."

"Snape's, no doubt," said Mark.

"I reckon if yer opens the concern yer'll diskiver the in-dy-vidooal as it belonged to," suggested Gridley.

"Snape, sure enough," cried Harry as he drew some letters from one of the pockets; "here's his name on one of these envelopes."

"That's enough, then, Harry," said Mark; "you need not look any further. We must let the rascal have it back again when we meet him."

"My word! pardners, yer too blamed consid'rate," remonstrated Gridley, as Harry, complying with Mark's hint, closed the pocket-book. "In tradin' wi' tarnation rogues it's a durned mistake to be extry honest. Yer'll be left ev'ry time."

"But with men of honour a rogue's property is as sacred as an honest man's," persisted Mark combating Gridley's ethics, though not offensively.

"Likely yer own dockuments is inter thet wallet," argued the storekeeper not a whit abashed.

"That's true," assented Mark; "and, perhaps, under the circumstances, we may be justified in examining the contents of the pocket-book."

"I calc'late yer just are," rejoined Gridley triumphantly. "If yer gev' 'em back to Snape, he'd laugh at yer fer a couple o' simples."

So Harry re-opened the pocket-book, and almost the first paper he unfolded proved to be Captain Birtle's letter of instructions.

The brothers, entertaining no further compunctions, thoroughly examined the contents of the pocket-book, closely scrutinising every document, and, had they previously harboured a doubt as to Snape's villany, they found papers that proved it beyond question.

"The varmint must hev kerried that wallet in the breast-pocket o' his coat," said the storekeeper; "an' when he had ter bend a'most double ter grope along this blessed drain, the thing dropt out an' he never spotted it."

"Yes, that is probably how it happened," said Mark.

"Waal, pardners, yer may shake han's wi' yerselves fer hevin' rekiwered so much o' yer lost persessions. Let's hope it's a kinder sign thet the baryometer o' yer luck's pointin' ter 'Set Fair.'"

"But if the rascal's been here, he must have carried off the money," exclaimed Harry excitedly.

"I reckon we'll know all about that ef we push ahead," remarked Gridley placidly.

So Harry carefully placed the wallet in his pocket and resumed the interrupted journey.

The tunnel gradually deepened until they could walk upright, and just as they had begun to expect to soon reach the second cavern, Harry came to a halt, as he found he could go no farther.

"We must have made some mistake, Mark," he said; "this cannot be the place uncle described."

"It corresponds in every particular, except that there is no water in the watercourse, and this tunnel appears to be blocked," responded Mark.

"Could Snape have blocked it, do you think?" queried Harry.

"How could he, when he dropped his pocket-book in the dry bed?" answered Mark.

"That's true. I had forgotten."

"Just look thar, mister," said Gridley, pointing to the end of the tunnel; "that stuff ain't the same sorter stuff as the bottom an' sides an' top o' this yer drive or adit or whatever yer calls it."

"No; it's quite white, and it glistens, while the rest of the tunnel is a brownish sandstone."

"Tell yer what, boss," exclaimed Gridley; "it's what they dee-nominates a 'staggerertight,' an' it must hev staggered till it jambed itself tight inter this yer drain."

"I think you are right, Mr. Gridley," rejoined Mark. "Uncle stated that there were stalactites and stalagmites in the second cave, and that he had hidden the money behind one of the stalagmites."

"Thet's it, mister. I wasn't sartin o' the name o' the durned thing, but I'd a notion o' what it sounded like."

"This accounts for Snape hanging about the place so long," remarked Harry. "If he'd obtained the money he'd sailed away quickly enough. Very likely he's trying to recover something from the wreck to repay him for all his trouble and trickery."



"Well, I'm glad his villainy hasn't been rewarded with uncle's money," observed Mark; "but it's just as far out of our reach as if he had it."

"Yes, Mark," said Harry, "it looks very much as though we have had our journey for nothing."

So the brothers and Gridley returned to Napuka, even more depressed than they had been when they believed that Snape had obtained possession of the treasure.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### CONFRONTED.

It was arranged that the brothers and the storekeeper should go down the coast the following day to the place where the wreck lay, partly with the object of confronting Snape and also with the view to ascertain what chance existed of obtaining anything valuable from the sunken vessel.

A further present of tobacco to Birara secured the loan of a large canoe and the services of a fresh crew, so early in the morning the party were once more afloat and proceeding southwards.

They ran far enough into the bay at Kanaputa to see that the brig still lay at anchor, and then, instead of crossing the bay and issuing through the passage on the opposite side, they rounded the point outside, and so escaped observation by the people aboard the *Taniwha*, as the brothers wished to come upon Snape unexpectedly.

They passed Matuko, and continued along inside the reef until they came in sight of the opening, and there, as they had anticipated, they discovered quite a flotilla of boats and canoes.

Immediately the Napuka canoe was observed there was a commotion noticeable among the little squadron, and hurried preparations for resistance were made; but Gridley had expected something of the sort, and had rested his men before rounding the last point, so that he was able to



sweep down upon the enemy long before they were ready to welcome him as they evidently would have liked to do.

"So we have met once more, Mr. Snape," exclaimed Mark as the canoe ran alongside the boat in which their late shipmate stood.

The unmasked scoundrel gazed apprehensively at the brothers, and his sallow face assumed a greenish tinge when he noticed the strong crew of islanders they had with them.

"Look, Mark!" exclaimed Harry pointing to the other boat. "Why, there's Mudge; the rascals were in league after all."

"Thet's the critter as said he war Cap'n Birtle's nevvv," interjected Gridley.

"Don't you feel proud of your achievements, Mr. Snape?" said Mark sarcastically.

"Well, the fact is," replied Snape—who had recovered from the alarm the sudden appearance of the brothers had occasioned, particularly as he observed no preparations being made for a conflict, that he had at first regarded as inevitable—"you were so precious green, it seemed a pity you should get that lump o' money your uncle had so luckily dropped upon."

"No doubt you think you deserve it for your cleverness," retorted Mark.

"Well, you needn't make such a fuss; neither of us will have it," coolly rejoined Snape.

"You'll have to answer for obtaining that money from Messrs. Bannatyne & Fletcher by false pretences," exclaimed Harry incensed at the rascal's impudence.

"That's if they can catch me," returned Snape with a cunning leer. "With what we've got out of this wreck we shall be able to settle down quite respectable somewhere else than in Australia."

"But it's robbery for you to take anything from this wreck," cried Harry his anger increasing.

"No more robbery for me than it was for Captain Birtle," retorted Snape. "You didn't call it robbery when you thought of getting it yourselves."

"Look here, Mr. Snape," interposed Mark ; "the money you paid for the charter of the brig was our money, so we lay claim to the brig."

"Claim away, my hearties," cried Snape derisively ; "but claiming won't get her," and he continued, with a ring of triumph in his voice—"In less than a week I'll have cleaned out this old hull, and then I'll up anchor and make tracks for a comfortable little place I know of, with enough money in my pocket to be honest and respectable for the remainder of my days."

"How did you get here ? " inquired Mudge, addressing the brothers, feeling uncomfortable at being so completely ignored, but having nothing more original to say.

"Mind your own business," retorted Harry. "We've had more than enough of your questioning. Your trouble will be how to get away."

While the brothers were wrangling with Snape and Mudge, Gridley had been closely watching the proceedings of the natives of the other party. Two of them had been engaged diving, but nothing could be seen in the boats or canoes of any particular value.

Addressing one of the divers in his own language, the storekeeper inquired what they were doing to the wreck. To which the native replied that they were trying to remove the deck timbers.

Gridley then noticed for the first time a chain hanging over the stern of Mudge's boat, and he surmised that this had a hook attached to it, with which it was intended to tear up the deck planks.

Speaking again to the diver, he inquired whether they had obtained much from the wreck, and the native answered that a great many things had been recovered

and that they had all been taken to the "big canoe," meaning the brig.

Snape, however, though he could not understand what had been said, objected to the storekeeper conversing with the diver, and ordered the native not to reply to any further questions. But Gridley had learnt as much as he cared to know, so turning to the brothers he suggested that they should return to Napuka.

Mark and Harry assented, and the storekeeper ordered the islanders to turn the canoe towards home.

Snape watched their movements very suspiciously, and when he saw them start northwards at a rapid rate he excitedly commanded his men to follow.

"The blamed cuss is chasin' us," exclaimed Gridley, when he saw the boats and canoes leaving the wreck; "what's his little game, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he thinks we're going to overhaul the brig," suggested Mark.

"That's about it," said Gridley. "Waal, I reckon we'll give him a bit of a scare. Our men's pretty fresh, an' kin easily keep the lead o' them fellers." And the idea expanding as he spoke, he exclaimed, "By the stars an' bars! We'll run slick fer Kanaputa, an' if we git the ghost of a chance, we'll collar the ship. What d'yer say? Is it a go?"

Mark at first demurred, but gave in when Harry reminded him that he had said to Snape that, the brig having been chartered with their money, really belonged to them.

Gridley had scarcely waited for the brothers to assent to his proposition ere he urged the natives to show how they could paddle, promising them a stick of tobacco each if they distanced their pursuers.

The islanders, who thoroughly enjoy such contests, fully entered into the spirit of the affair, though they could not understand what it meant.

Swiftly and lightly the Napukan canoe skimmed over the calm waters of the lagoon, leaving far astern the Matuko craft, that had clumsy outriggers; but the two boats with four rowers each were not to be so easily shaken off.

Mile followed mile, and still the exciting race continued, the boats maintaining the distance that separated them from the Napukan canoe. The natives had probably never before been called upon to make such a sustained effort, and the strain began to tell upon them. By-and-bye, in spite of Gridley's threats and exhortations, the boats crept up foot by foot until the brothers abandoned all hope of gaining the brig.

But the pace was telling upon the boats' crews also, and the canoe once more held its own and then even gained a little upon its pursuers.

At last the narrow channel leading into the bay at Kanaputa could be seen, and the storekeeper encouraged the islanders to put forth a final effort. The men responded spiritedly, and away bounded the canoe, as if it possessed life.

The channel was entered and the boats were hidden behind the point, but before the canoe could traverse the channel and turn into the bay, the leading boat, steered by Snape, appeared round the point, and immediately the cliffs resounded with a loud report.

"Jee-rusalem!" exclaimed Gridley; "the critter's drawin' a bead on us. Sakes alive! He never reckons on droppin' one of us at thet range."

But the reason Snape had for firing the shot soon became obvious. It was intended to put those in charge of the brig upon their guard; and when the canoe arrived abreast of the little vessel the brothers saw four men with rifles ready to receive them if they attempted to board her.



The word was, therefore, given to the islanders to paddle ahead; but before the canoe passed out through the natural archway derisive cheers came over the still waters from the boats' crews, to which Gridley responded by shaking his fist towards the brig and exclaiming:

"Ah, yer tarnation cusses, it's yer turn to crow now, but 'fore long I guess we'll hev the rooster on our side o' the hedge."

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

NAPUKA was in a state of commotion when the canoe reached the landing-place. The great drum was being beaten, and shouts and screams could be heard even before the village came into view. The islanders who were paddling became intensely excited, and strained every muscle to increase the speed of the canoe; for to them the noises were significant of a pleasurable event, and they were impatient to learn the occasion of the rejoicing and eager to participate in the general jubilation.

Scarcely pausing to haul the canoe up on the beach, away the natives dashed into the village, while Gridley, almost equally excited, calling to the brothers to follow him, ran off in the same direction.

A strange spectacle greeted their eyes as they gained the level of the plateau on which the village stood. On the platform in front of the ofilau sat Birara, with his wives clustered behind him, while by his side stood Koroko. In the midst of a circle formed of old men, women, and children, a large number of warriors were dancing to the music of the drum and several Pandean pipes of different sizes, both dancers and spectators singing spiritedly a quaint, oddly-syncopated native air.

Koroko quickly observed Mark and Harry, when, in violation of every ordinance of Solomon Island etiquette, he left his place by Birara's side, and ran to greet his

white friends, and conducted them to the platform, where he spread mats for them to sit on not far from the old chief.

The dance was a peculiar performance. In the midst of the circle a triangular-shaped body of men moved with the exactitude of clockwork, advanced and retreated, swayed first to one side and then to the other, bent forward and then backward, thrust out the right arm and afterwards the left, and wriggled the body into all sorts of strange postures, the dancers all the while raising their feet alternately and marking the most perfect time, strings of dry nutshells tied round the ankles emitting a strange sneeze-like noise as the feet touched the ground. Every gesture had evidently been perfected by repeated rehearsals, and each evolution was performed with such precision as could only be attained after prolonged and patient drilling. The general effect was extremely fantastic, and as the changes of both music and motion were frequent and often surprising, the brothers found the entertainment neither monotonous nor wearisome, though it continued with brief intermission for several hours.

Towards sundown the preparations for a great feast were commenced, and Koroko seized the opportunity and presented Mark and Harry to Birara, who, as the brothers had surmised, proved to be Koroko's father.

The old chief was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, especially to Harry, for having enabled his son to escape from the schooner, and he offered the brothers the services of his whole tribe, and promised to do everything they required of him without further payment.

"Waal, pardners," said Gridley, when they had returned to the store; "I reckon we've scored some ter-day."

"How's that, Mr. Gridley?" inquired Mark. "It seems to me we've had all our trouble for nothing."

"Come, don't be downhearted, mister. I allow thet things never looked rosier."

"But how do you make that out?" asked Mark rather testily.

"Why, it seems this young chief's a friend o' yourn, an' as Birara's goin' ter kinder take a back seat, so's ter make this yer Koroko boss o' the tribe, yer just about right in it. Yer'll hev the materials fer as sweet a little army as yer could dee-sire, an' yer'll be able ter just knock spots offn thet yer Snape whenever yer durned please."

"It wouldn't be right to embroil these natives on our account," objected Mark.

"Just yer don't let no such notion bother yer, mister," responded the storekeeper with an amused expression on his countenance. "They'll be real glad ter fight fer anybody as'll pervide 'em wi' some fightin'; it's the primeest o' their diversions. 'Sides, the bare sight on 'em 'll be enough ter settle that cuss Snape. The niggers won't hev ter fight."

"Well, we'll see what can be done," said Mark doubtfully. "But I'd rather give up everything than sacrifice a single life."

"I agree with you, Mark," observed Harry; "but I am also of Mr. Gridley's opinion, that merely by a show of force we shall be able to bring those scoundrels, Snape and Mudge, to book."

"We'll talk the matter over with Koroko in the morning," said Mark cautiously, and so dismissed the subject for the time.

The following morning, in fulfilment of a promise he had made to Harry, Koroko visited the store, and related the manner of his escape from the *Polly Hopkins*.

He said he had taken Harry's advice and waited until nightfall before making the attempt. He had remained in the hold, so that his anxiety and uneasiness should not be noticed; but when he went on deck shortly before sundown, he was startled and dismayed to find the schooner far away from his island, which, indeed, he would not



have been able to see at all but for the fact that it was immediately in the track of the sinking sun.

His first impulse was to throw himself into the water, in the hope of escaping in the fast-gathering darkness, for he felt confident of being able to swim the distance, his only dread being that he would be shot before he could get beyond the range of Crudden's rifle.

But just as he was about to take the plunge the recruiter himself appeared on deck, and Koroko knew it would be nothing less than suicide to attempt to escape under his very eyes.

This enforced delay, however, afforded the young chief an opportunity of reconsidering his plans, and he remembered that the island to which his wife, Bebe, belonged, was situated not far in the direction in which the schooner was proceeding. He accordingly determined to wait a little longer.

His patience was rewarded; for just before the time arrived when the islanders would have been ordered below, he perceived the familiar outline of Bebe's island right ahead, and the look-out man's negligence allowed the vessel to run quite close in to the land.

This was Koroko's opportunity. In imitation of the sailors, he cried "Land ho! land ho!" and in the midst of the confusion that ensued, while the schooner was being put about, he slipped over the side unobserved and swam ashore.

When he reached Bebe's village his joy was boundless, as he found that his wife had got safely back from Queensland, her health having given way in consequence of the poignancy of her grief at being parted from her husband. She was thus sent back before her term had quite expired, and, not being worth re-engaging, she had been put ashore in the vain hope that she would decoy some of her tribe to recruit.

Koroko was hospitably received by Bebe's kinsmen, and to avoid the danger of encountering the *Polly Hopkins* and of once more falling into the hands of the labour traders, he remained a day at her village before crossing to Napuka.

Harry congratulated Koroko upon the fortunate issue of all his troubles, and the young chief expressed his lifelong gratitude to the brothers, and his anxiety to be of service to them, for the storekeeper had told him how Pugsley had been paid to remain for the night on the coast.

"Waal," said Gridley when he had translated Koroko's thanks and offers of assistance, "the p'int is, will yer take Koroko's judgment as ter what's best ter be did?"

"I'm afraid," said Mark, "that his sense of indebtedness will render him eager to risk his own and his men's lives on our behalf; but please tell him that I do not wish for anyone, except myself and my brother, to incur personal danger. Please explain everything to him unreservedly, we are certain he is perfectly trustworthy."

The storekeeper accordingly informed Koroko of the nature of the business that had brought the brothers to Napuka, of the difficulties they had encountered, and of the enemies who were trying to secure a portion of the salvage from the wreck.

As Mark had anticipated, Koroko's eagerness to conduct a band of warriors against Snape could scarcely be controlled, nor could he be made to understand Mark's objections to such a proceeding. He was, however, persuaded to defer the proposed attack until the brig attempted to get away; no more definite promise could be extracted from him, as he was determined that the brothers' enemies should not escape with any portion of the treasure.

As an alternative scheme Koroko advised that the brig should be constantly watched, and should a favourable

opportunity present itself that the vessel should be seized and placed in charge of a body of Napukans.

After some argument the brothers assented to this project, on the expressed understanding that the islanders were not to fight ; but Koroko's ready acquiescence on this point aroused some doubt in Mark's mind as to whether the young chief really intended to observe the condition.

With regard to the recovery of the treasure hidden in the cavern, Koroko said he could conduct them over the hills to the summit of the cliffs surrounding the glen in which the inland entrance to the cave was to be found, and he suggested that an attempt should be made to enter the cave on that side by descending over the cliffs into the glen.

Mark and Harry recognised the value of Koroko's advice, and it was arranged that they should set out on the following morning for the place.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### ROGUES FALL OUT.

IN fulfilment of Koroko's proposition, the brothers and Gridley accompanied the young chief down to the beach, where two picked crews of forty islanders were ordered to prepare two of the largest war canoes for the reconnoitring expedition to Kanaputa.

While the warriors were thus busily engaged, Koroko and his friends proceeded to discuss the details of their plans; but they were soon interrupted by a shout from the crowd of natives who were watching with great interest the proceedings of their favoured comrades.

Looking in the direction indicated by the gesticulating islanders, a boat was observed to have just appeared round the southern headland, manned by two natives, and with a white man steering, who in another moment was identified as Mudge.

"I wonder what trick is to be played upon us now," exclaimed Mark.

"It will have to be a very clever trick indeed for those rascals to take us in again," responded Harry. "*Experientia docet*, and all that sort of thing. I vote we don't parley with the fellow, but send him back about his business."

"Gently, mister," said Gridley. "I judge that, as the game's, as it wer', in our han's neow, we kin afford to be grashus. Whatever's the'r little game, I reckon we kin

bounce down the right bower ev'ry time. Let's hear what the durned critter's got ter say fer hisself."

The storekeeper's advice was accepted, so when Mudge stepped ashore his reception, if not cordial, was not markedly hostile.

"Mr. Derrison," he said, as he came to where Mark was standing, "I've something I'd like to tell you"; and though he endeavoured to disguise his trepidation he was manifestly impressed by observing the great canoes filled with stalwart warriors that were now waiting to convey the brothers down the coast, and by noticing the good terms on which they evidently stood with the Napukans.

"Tell on, then, Mr. Mudge," rejoined Mark. "Whatever you have to say you may say in the presence of my friends here, who have my entire confidence."

"I'd rather speak with you alone," said Mudge.

"And I would rather that you spoke in the presence of these gentlemen," replied Mark. "You must excuse me, but I have already been deceived by you and your accomplice, and I am determined to take every precaution against a second deception."

"I'm sorry to be obliged to admit, Mr. Derrison, that your suspicion is justified," said Mudge humbly. "But I've come to tell you that I've broken with that scoundrel Snape, and that I'm prepared to atone as far as possible for the injury I have done you, by assisting you to circumvent Snape's schemes."

"I would rather be without your assistance," responded Mark contemptuously.

"Ah, I dare say you think that, because I've rounded on Snape, I'm not to be depended on; but you may depend on my hate. I'll never forgive the miscreant."

"I repeat that I would rather not have your assistance," said Mark. "You can see we have already secured powerful allies, with whose assistance we could, if we

wished, take summary vengeance upon you and your companion."

"Oh, no, no! don't let the natives murder me," cried Mudge as he fell on his knees in an agony of alarm. "That's what Snape is plotting to do. That's why I ran away."

"How's that, mister?" asked Gridley.

"Oh, we've been getting a lot of valuable stuff up out of the wreck—it's almost all recovered now—and I overheard that villain arranging to pay Kerewa to murder me, so that he would have my share. The brig is to leave to-morrow night, and Snape arranged with Kerewa that I should be murdered to-night. Oh, save me! save me! Don't send me back to be murdered!"

"This is a strange development," exclaimed Harry. "Do you think the fellow's acting, or is he really afraid of being killed?"

"See here, boss," said Gridley; "ef thet's actin' the cuss'd lick Jefferson inter fits. No, pardners, the critter's gen-u-winely scared."

"Of course we can't let him be murdered," said Mark; "but beyond that I don't feel disposed to have anything to do with him. Ask Koroko what shall be done."

Gridley explained matters to the young chief, who at once called two natives and, pointing to Mudge, told them to conduct him to one of the houses in the village, to give him plenty of food and drink, but on no account to allow him to escape, nor to permit anyone to harm him.

The storekeeper translated Koroko's instructions to the brothers, who were perfectly satisfied; but when Mudge saw the two natives advancing towards him he fully believed that the brothers had delivered him up to be killed, and with a shriek of terror he fled along the beach.

The two natives instantly set off in pursuit, but fear lent speed to Mudge's long legs, and the chase would have

been a long one had the fugitive not come into collision with an old native woman who unsuspectingly issued from among a grove of cocoa-nut palms at the very moment Mudge came rushing past. The shock was a violent one, and both the parties rolled down the steep bank and lay for several moments stunned and helpless. The instinct of self-preservation, however, quickly reanimated Mudge, and he struggled to his feet intending to resume his flight ; but the old woman convulsively clasped his legs, and before he could release himself his pursuers were upon him.

The poor, terrified wretch presented a pitiable spectacle as he was half led half carried back to the village by his captors. His face was ghastly white and his eyes seemed starting out of his head, as he glanced fearfully from side to side in momentary expectation of receiving the fatal stroke. He trembled so with fright that his limbs could scarcely support him, and he supplicated the natives so piteously to spare his life that Mark took compassion on him, and, going forward, assured him that his life was perfectly safe.

"Oh, thank you ! thank you, Mr. Derrison !" he cried almost delirious with joy. "I'll work for you all my life if you'll save me from being killed. I'll tell you everything about Snape's plans. I'll help you to seize the brig. I'll do anything you ask me, only don't let these cannibals kill me."

"I assure you, Mudge, your life is perfectly safe," responded Mark. "These men will take you to one of the huts in the village and will see that you have plenty to eat and drink, but you must not attempt to escape. As I told you before, we do not want your assistance to defeat Snape's schemes ; but we may require you as a witness against him if we are ever able to bring him to justice."

"I'll give evidence against the villain willingly," exclaimed Mudge with evident eagerness ; "and you'd

better let me explain Snape's plot as then you'll be ready to circumvent the rascal."

"Not at present, at any rate, Mudge," replied Mark. "Now go quietly with these men, as you have my word that you shall not be treated unkindly."

"Thank you, Mr. Derrison; thank you!" exclaimed Mudge, whose gratitude seemed too fervent for many words.

"Waal, neow, pardners," said Gridley, "ef thet critter's yarn's dependable we've got no time to lose. Ef thet cuss, Snape, allows ter skedaddle ter-morrer night we must be ready ter prevent him."

"If it's possible to seize the brig by stratagem and without endangering any lives I'm willing that it should be done," replied Mark.

"Waal, boss, ter shape a stratagem, it'll be obligatory ter diskiver what's doin' aboard thet vessel down ter Kanaputa, so I guess we'd better make tracks along the coast right away."

So they took their places in the canoes and went southward in the direction of Kanaputa.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### CHECKMATED.

WHEN the reconnoitring party arrived opposite the great natural archway they did not enter the bay, but kept to the eastward along the precipitous coast until they came to a small indentation, where a narrow beach enabled them to land.

Koroko at once led the way to a steep ravine and the brothers and Gridley followed, the climb though short proving both dangerous and fatiguing.

Having attained the summit, they had but to cross a small plateau to gain a point whence they could look down upon the brig that seemed almost within reach immediately below them.

They noticed that a vigilant watch was being maintained, the recent narrow escape from capture having evidently rendered Snape wary. But it did not occur to the men on the look-out to gaze in the direction of the sky for their assailants. Their attention was divided between the archway entrance and the passage to the southward, near which the *Taniwha* was anchored.

"I judge our chance o' ketchin' 'em on the hop is past an' gone," said Gridley. "They're jest lookin' both ways for Sunday."

"Is it possible to block the entrances to the bay?" asked Harry.

"That's not at all a bad idee, mister," said Gridley. "Let's see what Koroko ses about it."

"Plenty too muchy water," replied the islander when Harry's suggestion was communicated to him.

"He means the water's too durned deep," explained the storekeeper. "I guess, ef we'd plenty o' time, we could fill up them canyons; but ef Snape's goin' ter slide ter-morrer, the notion's non-feasible—it won't gee."

"Besides," observed Mark, "if we obstructed the channels the brig would be of no use to us either."

"Thet's so," assented Gridley.

"What do you propose then?" asked Harry.

"I don't see that we can do anything just yet," replied Mark. "We can only remain on the watch ready to seize any opportunity that presents itself."

"That's not a very encouraging programme," objected Harry. "Suppose no opportunity presents itself, may not we make one?"

"Not if it involves any danger of the natives becoming embroiled," returned Mark resolutely.

"See here, pardners," interposed Gridley; "I perpose we plant some o' the niggers right here ter keep an eye on the brig, an' thet we slide back an' fix a boom acrost the openin' oppersite the village. Snape's sure ter wait fer nightfall ter cut an' run, an' a boom acrost the openin' 'll puzzle him more'n enough."

"That's a good idea," exclaimed Mark, and as neither Harry nor Koroko could suggest a better plan they posted the crew of one of the canoes on the cliff overlooking Kanaputa, and returned to the village.

They at once set to work to carry out Gridley's scheme, and a tall palm having been selected as suited to their purpose, it was quickly felled and denuded of its leafy crown, and by the united exertions of nearly a hundred natives it was conveyed to the beach and floated across to the opening in the reef.

It was of ample length, but the difficulty that presented

itself was how the obstruction should be concealed, for they knew that the crew of the brig would make short work of it if they could see of what it consisted.

Gridley, however, had carefully thought out the details of his plan, and by his direction several heavy blocks of coral were firmly tied at each end of the boom, and a piece of strong rope, about twelve feet in length, with a heavy block of coral attached to it, was also fastened at each end of the boom, which was then lowered into the water on the inner side of the reef. The blocks of coral tied to the boom caused it to sink, but when the blocks attached to the ropes were lowered into the water on the outer side of the reef they acted as a counterpoise and the boom remained submerged about three feet from the surface.

It was sundown before every preparation had been completed, and shortly after dark the natives who had been left to watch the brig came back to the village with the intelligence that the anchor had been weighed and the vessel was being towed out of the bay by a boat and a canoe.

"The durned critter's got scared cause th' other cuss hes gey him the slip," said Gridley. "He means ter git out ter-night, an' he'd a bin able ter do it too, fer the wind 'll help him consid'able soon's he's clear o' the archway. I wished we could a pinned him right thar."

"How long do you think it will be before he reaches the entrance?" asked Mark.

"Nigh upon midnight, mister," replied Gridley. "Boat towin's consider'ble slow work anyway, even when the wind's fav'able; but I judge he'll git right there by midnight."

Koroko had all his men on the alert, with every canoe prepared for instant launching, and a small party of natives went down to the southern point to give warning of the approach of the brig.

The hours passed slowly to the brothers and their allies, but, feeling confident of the success of their stratagem, they awaited the result with patience.

The village and the store were in perfect darkness, not a sign of life or activity being visible, when the watchers on the southern headland signalled that the brig was in sight.

Another hour passed and the vessel rounded the point and slowly made for the opening in the reef. The boat's crew toiled at the oars, which were handled so carefully that very little noise was made, and not a word was spoken.

The brig steadily approached the entrance, when, just as the boat turned seawards, the watchers were surprised to observe an outrigger canoe with one man in it leave the dense shadow of the headland and glide across the lagoon towards the entrance.

"Sakes alive! Who's that?" whispered Gridley.

"Is it Koroko or any of the islanders, do you think?" said Harry.

"No; Koroko's there," replied Mark, pointing to a group crouched in the shadow of a clump of bananas.

"Then who can it be?" queried Harry. "None of the natives would move without Koroko's order. Do you think he's working some plot of his own?"

"No. Look; here he comes," exclaimed Mark as Koroko crept cautiously across to them, keeping in the deep shadow of the bushes.

The young chief was as greatly surprised as the brothers at the appearance of the canoe, but he suggested that perhaps the solitary paddler was Kerewa, who might have acted in some way as a pilot to the brig.

However, without the watchers ashore being able to identify the occupant, the canoe swiftly but silently ran alongside the boat, which was now passing through the opening in the reef, the men straining every muscle to

keep the brig in motion against the wash of the surf as it rushed into the lagoon.

Foot by foot they towed the little vessel onward, until it seemed to them that their task was virtually accomplished. Foot by foot the brig advanced towards the entrance, until the watchers ashore relinquished all hope and felt convinced that their elaborately arranged scheme had entirely miscarried.

But by the dim light of the stars it was difficult to accurately estimate distances, and several minutes after Mark and Harry had abandoned every expectation of arresting the progress of Snape's vessel they were startled by hearing a loud creaking and straining of timber, and they knew that the boom had at any rate been temporarily successful in impeding the exit of the brig.

The scene at the opening in the reef was intensely exciting. The boat's crew were perplexed at the sudden check they had experienced, but it seemed to them that it had either been caused by the vessel touching on a coral point or by a more than usually powerful wave.

The spring of the boom had driven the brig back some distance into the lagoon, and when the rowers, by exerting their utmost power, had once more got the little vessel in motion, they made a supreme effort to take her through the entrance with a rush.

Again the *Taniwha* encountered the boom, again the creaking and straining re-echoed over the water, and again the brig rebounded from the boom, tightening the hawser and dragging the boat with her. This retrograde movement rendered the boat quite unmanageable, and a heavy roller taking her at the same moment dashed her against the southern point of the reef, and in an instant the crew were battling for their lives in the surf.

Cries of alarm resounded through the brig, but the men aboard her were powerless to aid their comrades, for they

had no boat, Mudge having run off with one and the other having just been disabled.

The boat's crew fortunately were all strong swimmers, and they succeeded after many failures in clambering upon the reef, where they lay completely exhausted.

The brothers and their friends had anxiously awaited the issue of their plot, and when they heard the cries of alarm aboard the brig they knew that their opportunity had arrived.

At a whispered word of command they ran stealthily down to the beach, where Koroko and his men, without an instant's delay, launched six large canoes, and in less time than it occupied in the relation the brig was approached on both sides. Nimbly the assailants climbed up the chains and noiselessly they descended upon the deck.

The crew of the brig were all gathered in the bows, intently watching their comrades struggling for their lives in the sea, and by the time the last man had gained a place of safety on the reef the little vessel was in the possession of Koroko and his men, and the crew were prisoners.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### SNAPE MISSING.

BUT where was Snape ?

The vessel was searched from stem to stern and from truck to keel, yet no sign of the arch-villain could be discovered.

"Was Snape in the boat ?" Mark inquired of one of the brig's crew.

"No, sir ; he came along after in a canoe," replied the man.

"By-the-bye, what became of that canoe ?" asked Mark turning to his companions.

No one had noticed. They had seen it alongside the boat, but had not observed it subsequently.

"P'raps them critters onto the reef 'll be able ter tell us," suggested Gridley.

A canoe was accordingly sent to take the men off the reef, and they were put aboard the brig.

"Yes, Snape fouled us goin' through the openin'," replied one of the men to Mark's inquiry ; "his paddle got in the way o' my oar, an' I knocked it clean out o' his grip. The brig struck at that minit, an' I clean forgot all about Snape. He must be waitin' about outside somewheres."

"We'll catch him as soon as it is light then," said Harry.

"I calc'late yer won't just do nothin' o' the sort, mister," exclaimed Gridley in an excited tone ; "I'll be consid'able s'prised ef yer ever clap eyes on the varmint agin,"

"Why, how's that?" demanded Mark.

"Mister, there's a current sweepin' down by this island thet'd carry a ship clar out o' sight afore sunup, an' ef thet unfort'nate cuss Snape's adrift on a heavy outrigger canoe wi'out nary paddle he'll fetch up goodness knows whar."

"Couldn't we go to his rescue?" anxiously inquired Mark.

"'Twouldn't be no use," responded Gridley; "he's fur away by now, an' we couldn't tell which way the current sets."

"But it's terrible to allow a fellow creature to drift away on the ocean to perish," protested Mark, generously forgetting every injury that Snape had done him. "Ask Koroko what can be done."

Gridley explained to the young chief what Mark wished, but Koroko's reply extinguished every hope and convinced Mark that it would be a little short of madness to attempt to rescue the unfortunate man, for the Napukan explained that the current, according to the weather, ran sometimes to the east and sometimes to the west of an island a short distance southward, and that its alternate courses diverged until they were hundreds of miles apart in the open ocean.

"I'm sorry for Snape, and I would have assisted to rescue him if it had been possible," said Harry; "but it seems, from what these men say, that he richly deserved his fate, terrible as it is likely to be."

"Why, what has he done?" inquired Mark.

"He agreed to pay Kerewa, the chief of Matuko, for assisting him to recover the things from the wreck, but he refused to give the islander anything until the work was completed and the brig was ready to sail. Well, yesterday, when Kerewa noticed the preparations for departure, he again asked Snape for payment, but Snape told Kerewa he would not pay until the brig was safely out of the lagoon, and he urged the islander to bring his men to guard the brig until she had got safely outside."



"He was a villain truly," admitted Mark. "He would have made one tribe fight the other, while he ran off with the plunder."

"A tarnation rogue," exclaimed Gridley; "he's just properly punished."

"But worse remains to be told," continued Harry. "Kerewa was naturally incensed at the duplicity that was being practised upon him, and he refused to bring his men to guard the brig, for he clearly perceived that, if once the brig got outside the lagoon, his chances of payment would be slight indeed. Snape, however, flatly refused to pay, and Kerewa became very angry, and threatened to return with his tribe and attack the brig. To arouse Kerewa's anger, it would seem, was a portion of Snape's scheme, for he awaited no second threat, but drew his revolver and shot the poor old chief dead in his canoe."

"Thar ain't no mistake about it, he's a consid'able rascal," interjected the storekeeper.

"The scoundrel richly deserves the worst fate that can befall him," exclaimed Mark indignantly.

"The act appears to have brought about its own retribution," continued Harry; "for as he threw Kerewa's body out of the canoe, the idea of keeping clear of danger while the brig was getting out of the lagoon seems to have occurred to him. When he returned aboard he told the captain that he intended to follow the brig in the canoe to give warning if the Matuko natives were inclined to be troublesome and to watch for any movement ashore when the vessel arrived opposite Napuka. The captain thought the plan a very strange one at the time, but he is now of the opinion that Snape apprehended that we would make an attack as the brig attempted to leave the lagoon, and, as we saw, he remained in the shadow of the headland until there seemed no doubt as to the brig getting safely away."

"The cuss is a coward as well's a villain," said Gridley contemptuously. "Ef some o' the niggers down the coast gets hold on him an' eats him, the world'll be well rid o' the rascal."

Mark still entertained a faint hope that, when the day broke, some sign of the wretched man would be visible, and he awaited the coming of the light with anxiety and impatience; but the grey dawn appeared and revealed nothing to break the dull monotony of the heaving water, nor when the sun rose in all his radiance could any object be seen on the glistening waves.

"He's a gone coon," exclaimed Gridley; "an' I judge it's a good job too."

"What are we going to do with the brig?" inquired Harry.

"Unless yer goin' right away," replied the storekeeper, "yer'd better tote her right back ter Kanaputa. 'Twouldn't be safe ter keep her here; a squall'd drive her ashore on ter the reef in five minits."

The brothers recognised the wisdom of Gridley's advice, and at once arranged with Koroko for his men to tow the brig back to Kanaputa.

Mark then explained to the captain of the brig how Snape had stolen the order for the money with which the brig had been chartered, as well as the papers that had apprised him of the position of the wreck.

"I've heard something of that already, Mr. Derrison," said the captain; "Mudge told me about it yesterday; but I was in a manner committed to Snape, and I didn't see how I could get clear of him, though I'd have liked to."

"Are you prepared, then, to recognise my brother and me as your charterers?" inquired Mark; "and to carry out with us the agreement made with Snape?"

"I am quite prepared to do so," replied the captain promptly.

"Then perhaps you'll excuse the slight suspicion with

which we are forced to regard you, having been, as it were, in Snape's service, if not in his confidence," said Mark apologetically. "We should like you and your crew, except four men, who will remain on board to guard the vessel, to reside ashore until we are ready to return to Australia."

"I can understand your feelings, Mr. Derrison," the captain responded, "and I've no objection to offer."

"If you will give me your word that you will not move the brig without my orders," said Mark, "your movements ashore shall be entirely unrestrained."

"Thank you, Mr. Derrison ; I give you my word."

The captain and his crew accordingly went ashore, where they were provided with comfortable quarters in the village.

The brothers and Gridley then went into the cabin that Snape had occupied, and there, in Mark's own box, they found the articles that had been recovered from the wreck.

The large chest was almost filled with pieces of massive plate, some of silver, but the greater portion of gold, of the most beautiful designs and elaborately chased.

Promising themselves to examine the treasure piece by piece when a more convenient opportunity presented itself, they carefully replaced the articles, and soon after the box was lowered over the side into Mudge's boat and taken ashore, where it was securely locked in the inner room of the store.

Three canoes then took the brig in tow, and before noon she was once more lying snugly at anchor off Kanaputa.

## CHAPTER XL.

### MUDGE'S CONFESSION.

THE precipitance with which Snape had acted had, to a certain extent, deranged the brothers' plans; but Mark and Harry had ample reason to be satisfied with the outcome of the recent unexpected events, for they had, as it were, inherited the fruits of Snape's three weeks of patient search, and they had thus achieved, with scarcely an effort, results that would, under less fortuitous circumstances, have entailed upon them arduous and prolonged exertion.

It had been arranged that the expedition across the hills to the summit of the cliffs surrounding the glen in which the inland entrance to the cavern was situated should be made on this particular day, but by the time the *Taniwha* had been towed safely back to her anchorage off Kanaputa, the day was too far advanced for them to set out on such an undertaking with any prospect of reaching the cliffs before nightfall.

The brothers, therefore, remained at Napuka, and at Harry's suggestion Mudge was sent for and asked to give an account of his and his companion's proceedings after Snape ran off with Mark's box.

Mudge readily complied, for, unaware of Snape's disappearance, he regarded the brothers as his protectors against his accomplice's murderous plot, and he desired by every means in his power to prove his willingness to be of service to them.

"It was Snape's plot from the very first," said Mudge.

"I paid very little heed to what you told us, Mr. Derrison, on board the *Morning Light*, and I should very likely have forgotten all about it if Snape hadn't asked me if I believed what you had said."

"I replied that I believed every word of it, to which Snape responded by saying: 'Then he's about the most consummate ass I ever heard of. Why, he's placed it in our power to chouse him out of a fortune without any risk to ourselves.'

"'How do you make that out?' I inquired, never for a moment supposing that he was making a serious proposal to rob you.

"'Didn't he tell us he'd papers describing the place where a lot of money lies hidden,' Snape said; 'and didn't he say there was an order on some firm in Sydney for the money necessary to charter a vessel to get to the place where the money is concealed?'

"I was obliged to admit that you had mentioned both those facts, Mr. Derrison.

"'Then,' said Snape, 'what is there to prevent us from getting those papers and obtaining the money?'

"Even then I didn't think he meant to propose that we should do what he suggested might be done, so I laughingly said 'yes, he was a bit of a fool to say so much about his affairs.'

"'And we'd be still greater fools if we missed such a chance,' Snape said, looking at me closely to see how I took it.

"'Oh, come,' I said, 'you don't mean to propose that we should turn thieves, do you?'

"'I'd rather be a thief than a fool, any day,' replied Snape; 'and I'd be a precious idiot to neglect such a chance.'

"And so he went on arguin' an' arguin' until I agreed to join him.

"Well, you know how we followed you to the Pier Hotel, Sandridge, and how Snape carried off your box. It was part of the plot that I should remain and see what steps you took to track him, and, if the telegraph to Sydney had been working, I should have kept him informed of your movements; but the line becoming interrupted played right into our hands, and as soon as communication was restored I received a message from Snape, telling me that he had got the money from the agents, and directing me to get across to Auckland as quickly as I could with the papers."

"What! Did you have the papers?" interjected Harry.

"Yes; Snape wanted to take them with him, but I knew very well that if I let him get away with them I should have a poor chance of seeing him or them again."

"And I suppose they were in the room all the time we were deploring our loss?" said Harry.

"Yes, Mr. Derrison; I had them in my box, and I was terribly afraid when the landlord asked if our other boxes were all right that there would be a general search. I heard everything you and your brother said after you went to bed the night the box was missing. I kept on snoring, but I heard every word you spoke, and then for the first time I realised that the treasure we were scheming to obtain must be very valuable."

"Well, directly I received Snape's telegram, I took my passage for New Zealand, by the steamer *Albion*, and in two days left Melbourne. Snape left Sydney the day before in the *Kingfisher*, and of course he had to wait for me some time at Auckland. But he employed the time well, for when I arrived there I found that he had chartered the *Taniwha*, that smart little brig you saw down the coast, to take us to the islands; so there was almost no delay. We went aboard the day after I got to Auckland, and the

following morning we beat out of the Hauraki Gulf, and had a fair wind all the way here, just getting into that snug little harbour in time to escape a terrific hurricane. We had such splendid luck that Snape was in the highest spirits, and made certain of getting clear away with the treasure long before you could get here, if ever you attempted to, which he scarcely expected."

"It is well we did not remain any longer at Brisbane on the look out for the rascal," observed Mark.

"Yes," rejoined Harry. "It did not occur to Mr. Fletcher, or either of us, that Snape would take a vessel from any other than an Australian port. He is a cunning scoundrel."

"You are right about that, he is a cunning scoundrel," said Mudge. "He has completely hoodwinked Freeling, the captain of the *Taniwha*, who believes that we came here to obtain birds' nests, and that we accidentally discovered the wreck. He knows nothing of the concealed treasure.

"My! Snape was raging when he found that he could not get the treasure. Early one morning Snape and I—for we would not trust each other—went together to explore the cave, and a most uncomfortable and unsatisfactory expedition it proved. Snape had prepared a couple of torches of tarry rope stuff, but when we put a match to one of them it gave but little light, while it emitted a suffocating quantity of smoke. We had literally to grope our way, especially along a low tunnel; and when we got to the end and found that the passage was blocked by the solid rock, Snape's rage was uncontrollable. I thought he would bring on a fit of some sort, he cursed and raved so wildly.

"His disappointment was so keen that for a time he completely lost control of his wits, and, in the midst of the flood of execrations he uttered he unintentionally

revealed to me a portion of his villainous scheme. He shrieked out, and the depths of the cave echoed and re-echoed the words in the most weirdly startling manner: 'The loss is mine—mine, I tell you—all mine! You wouldn't have had any of the gold. I would have killed you. You ought to be glad there's no gold. It's saved your life!' And he went on screaming and shouting in that way until he foamed at the mouth and became speechless and exhausted.

"When he had somewhat recovered he begged me to take no notice of what he had said, as he was crazy and did not know what he was saying or doing; but though I pretended to be satisfied, his ravings had put me on my guard, and I watched him constantly, and never let him out of my sight until I heard him bargaining with that old savage, Kerewa, to murder me. The villain that he is!

"Our forward course in exploring the cave had been bad enough, but the certainty of obtaining possession of an immense treasure had buoyed us up and enabled us to endure the inconveniences we encountered; but the troubles of the return journey were almost unendurable. The tunnel had become filled with the smoke from our torch, until it was almost impossible to breathe; indeed, we should certainly have been suffocated had we not at last extinguished the torch and crept along on our hands and knees, with our faces as close as possible to the ground, where the atmosphere was clearer. I hope I may never have another such experience. We were properly punished for our rascality."

"This explains the manner in which the pocket-book was lost," remarked Harry.

"Oh, you've been in the cave, have you?" said Mudge. "Yes, Snape lost his pocket-book, and he believed it dropped out of his pocket while we were in the cave; but though it contained all your uncle's papers



and a number of important letters belonging to Snape, he would not venture into the tunnel a second time to regain it. Very likely he would if he had known that you would follow so closely on his heels.

"However, we got into the daylight once more, and, crestfallen and disappointed, returned to the *Taniwha*.

"After much discussion we decided to try what was to be got from the wreck, and the following morning we took the boat down the coast, and by giving Kerewa a few presents, got him to show us where the wreck lay, though he at first pretended to know nothing about it; and afterwards he said it belonged to 'Biratala,' which we understood to mean Captain Birtle.

"We told him that Captain Birtle had given it to us, and that we would pay him well for everything that was recovered if he would assist us. So the old chief's scruples were overcome, and he took us to the place where the wreck lay and ordered a couple of his tribe to dive for us.

"For several days nothing rewarded our search, and Snape raved and raged until I thought he would actually become insane; but two days before you dropped on us we succeeded in wrenching off a portion of the deck near the stern, and the divers brought to the surface many pieces of gold and silver plate—salvers and chalices, and ewers and reliquaries—articles apparently forming portion of a service of church plate, belonging very likely to some Roman Catholic cathedral.

"This encouraged us to renewed exertion, and another portion of the deck being removed a further quantity of valuables was brought to the surface.

"We were busily engaged raising this second batch of articles when your canoe rounded the point and came speeding towards us, and we required every moment at our disposal to hide the precious salvage before you came upon us.

"Then you gave us another fright by going back at racing speed, for Snape insisted that you intended to seize the brig, and we were in a terrible funk, because the first lot of our valuables was aboard her.

"You know how we raced you back. Snape was dreadfully scared, and all that night he kept four men constantly on the watch, with their rifles loaded, in readiness to resist any attempt to capture the vessel.

"After you left the bay we went back to the wreck and completed the work of raising the treasure. I don't believe there's an article left worth diving for. Snape was in the highest spirits, and he laughed and joked when we got back to the brig about the way you had been 'done.'

"Kerewa was at the vessel late that evening urging Snape to pay him as he had agreed; but Snape refused, and the old chief went away very angry. He was back, however, with the first streak of daylight, and then I overheard the villain promise to pay him if he would murder me. Of course Kerewa consented, but he wanted to be paid there and then, and they wrangled and haggled for a long time, until at last Snape gave way and handed over to Kerewa a lot of buttons, beads, tobacco, and other things. This was the payment to kill me.

"As you may imagine, I was terribly frightened. For a few moments I gave myself up as lost. Then I remembered that you were here, and I determined to throw myself on your mercy. I seized an opportunity when Snape was busy in his cabin, and, having bribed two of the natives belonging to the brig's crew, we dropped quietly into the boat that lay alongside, and, without being observed, slipped out of the bay by the southern channel, near which the vessel was anchored.

"We came along the coast outside the bay, and you may be sure I made the men row hard all the way here."



"Well, Mudge, you seem to have had a pretty narrow escape," said Mark.

"Yes, Mr. Derrison; I should certainly have been murdered if I had remained on board the *Taniwha* last night. Curse that scoundrel for enticing me into this disgraceful business! I'll give evidence against him, if I have to go to gaol myself. Curse the villain!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Mark. "In all human probability the wretched man is already beyond the reach of justice. He is in greater danger of death than even you were yesterday."

"Why, how's that?" cried Mudge in amazement, his eyes almost starting from his head.

Mark explained the manner in which Snape's canoe had been swept away by the current, and the brothers were disgusted to observe a scarcely concealed expression of gratification on Mudge's countenance as the chances against Snape's survival were enumerated; and the abject fellow's satisfaction seemed complete when he heard that Snape had killed Kerewa. Thus had one enemy removed another from his path, and afterwards, as it seemed, met with a tragic fate himself.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### HISTORICAL.

"MUDGE's description of the articles recovered from the wreck to some extent confirms a supposition I have formed with reference to the identity of the submerged vessel," observed Mark, when the brothers and Gridley were discussing the narrative they had just listened to, Mudge having been taken back to his quarters in the village.

"What is your supposition, Mark?" inquired Harry.

"You remember, Harry, how I read those books in Mr. Fergusson's cabin; well, there was one relating chiefly to the Solomon Islands, in which I learnt for the first time something of the history of the exploration of the Pacific Ocean in general and of the discovery of the Solomon Islands in particular."

"You didn't find that very lively reading, did you, Mark?" chaffingly interjected Harry.

"Lively! It was fascinating. Like most boys, you are ready to devour with avidity stories of fictitious adventure; but I undertake to say that, if you commenced upon any good version of Mendana's or De Quiros's voyages in these seas, you would not lay it down until you had read it to the last page."

"But what has this to do with the wreck, Mark?" again interposed the practical Harry.

"All in good time, lad; I'm coming to that. Don't try to hurry me; you only throw me off the track."

"Well, mister, yer goin' slow enough not ter come ter no damage ef all yer cars leave the track," said Gridley satirically.

"Yes, Mark, put on a little more steam, there's a good fellow."

"Well, I was going to tell you that in the history of the discovery of the Solomon Islands that I studied aboard the *Polly Hopkins* I read that four ships left Peru in the year 1595, commanded by Don Alvaro de Mendana, of which expedition the famous Fernandez de Quiros was the chief pilot, and that two of those ships, the *Almiranta* and the *Fragata*, were lost."

"What!" exclaimed Harry in amazement; "do you think that wreck down the coast is the remains of one of those vessels that sailed from Peru in 1595?"

"Jee-ru-sa-lem! Thet's goin' a good piece back, isn't it, mister?" said Gridley quizzically.

"The wreck down the coast cannot be that of the *Fragata*," responded Mark, "because that was found, the vessel having driven ashore with all her sails set, and when discovered the people aboard her were all dried-up skeletons. But, according to the old chronicler, the *Almiranta* 'never more appeared.' It seems scarcely possible," continued Mark, "but from uncle's description of the wreck I am inclined to think that it may prove to be the *Almiranta*. You remember he stated that the hull had a lofty stern and bluff bows, and that she presented the appearance of 'such a craft as he had never seen afloat.'"

"But it can scarcely be possible," argued Harry. "Why she would have been lying there nearly three centuries, and her timbers would have rotted away."

"They would have rotted in less than half three centuries if they had been exposed to the air," replied Mark.

"Well, the wreck would be buried in sand or covered with barnacles, or mussels, or seaweed, or something else, if it had lain there all that time," persisted Harry.

"So it would, Harry, if something had not prevented the coral insects filling up that gap in the reef opposite the place where the wreck lies; but the wash that comes through that gap seems to have kept the wreck comparatively clear from both sand and marine incrustations."

"You seem to have made up your mind about it, old fellow," observed Harry; "so perhaps we'd better let you unburden yourself as to this wonderful history, and then we may have reason to agree with you."

"Fire ahead, boss!" cried Gridley.

"Very well, then," said Mark; "I'll just give you a rough outline of the history of the discovery of these islands from the notes I made when reading Mr. Fergusson's book. To Don Alvaro de Mendana belongs the honour of discovering these islands, but that honour is sadly tarnished by the cruelty of his dealings with the natives then inhabiting them. He set out with two ships from Calloa in 1566, having Hernando Gallego as his chief pilot. Fernandez de Quiros also accompanied the expedition. They sailed away westward for fifteen hundred Spanish leagues, until the sailors momentarily expected some unheard-of and terrible catastrophe, for no land had been sighted since leaving port, and the ignorant men believed the vessels had passed beyond the ends of the earth. On the 15th January, 1567, however, a small islet was sighted, and the men's confidence was restored. On the 1st February following an atoll off the coast of the Solomon Islands was discovered, but adverse winds prevented the vessels from reaching the main islands until the 7th of that month, just eighty days after leaving Callao.

"The natives went off to the vessels in their canoes, as

they used to do to the modern traders, and they were peaceable and hospitable, supplying the adventurers with food of various kinds and freely allowing them to land and build a brigantine. The explorers, however, repaid this friendliness with cruelty, for a large body of sailors went into the interior and returned boasting of having burned down 'many temples dedicated to snakes and toads,' and probably they killed many of the islanders who defended the temples, for two of the sailors were wounded, one of whom died of lockjaw.

"When the brigantine was built, Gallego took command of her and explored the entire group, with the exception of the island now known as Bougainville. Wherever the adventurers went they came into collision with the natives, and, even when judged by Gallego's account of the voyage, it is apparent that the islanders' animosity was fully justified by the unfair and high-handed proceedings of the Spaniards. They enticed the natives aboard and would not allow them to leave the vessel; they went ashore and took by force anything they wanted; they killed and ill-treated the islanders without the slightest compunction; and they broke faith with them on every occasion, until the whole population of the islands was aroused; consequently when the ships left to return to Peru, having been among the islands just six months, they had to start very badly provided with food and with but a short supply of water, for the natives had concealed their stores of yams and had driven their pigs into the hills, and they resolutely attacked the adventurers whenever they landed to procure water. The sufferings of the Spaniards on the return voyage were terrible; disaster followed disaster, until they almost abandoned all hope of reaching Peru again; but after eleven and a half months of dire privation and hardship of every kind they arrived at their destination.

"When Don Alvaro de Mendana was once more among his compatriots, he gave such wonderful accounts of the surpassing beauty and fertility of the islands he had discovered, and of the happiness and docility of their inhabitants, besides throwing out mysterious hints concerning enormous mountains of gold and valleys filled with precious stones, that the very mention of the Isles of Salomon — as he named them — conjured up visions of wealth and magnificence that kindled afresh the spirit of adventure for which the Spaniards of that period were justly famous. The naming of the islands, indeed, was but the implication of a fantastic idea that King Solomon drew thence his supplies of gold and precious stones for the adornment of the Temple at Jerusalem.

"A circumstance flattering to British susceptibilities, and at the same time significant of the absolute credence with which Mendana's narrative was received, was the prohibition of the publication of Gallego's journal of the voyage, so that it should not afford England's bold navigator, Drake, a clue to the situation of such a valuable possession. To the present day this journal remains in manuscript.

"How many private enterprises were undertaken having for their goal the Isles of Salomon will probably never be known; but it is scarcely possible that such glowing and romantic accounts as Mendana and his associates gave of their discoveries could have been listened to without some bold adventurer setting forth to seek his fortune, but who instead met his fate.

"One would have thought that Don Alvaro de Mendana's painful experience would have deterred him from making another such voyage; but he appears to have repeated his exaggerations until he actually believed them himself, for after an interval of twenty-seven years he once more set sail from Peru, bound for the Isles of



Salomon, having on this occasion command of a fleet of four vessels. They never reached the Isles of Salomon, but discovered the Marquesas Islands, and Mendana sacrificed his life in attempting to colonise one of the Santa Cruz group, which they also discovered. It was to this fleet the *Almiranta* belonged, but, after leaving the Marquesas Islands, she parted company from the others of the fleet, and 'never more appeared,' as the historian tersely but pathetically records the catastrophe.

"She had on board a hundred souls, and as the chief object of the expedition was to colonise the wonderful Isles of Salomon and to Christianise the inhabitants, there were many priests among the adventurers, and probably one or more services of plate were taken for the use of the missionary churches."

"Well, when you come to know the history of the islands," observed Harry, "your supposition doesn't seem so preposterous after all. But surely they wouldn't set out on a voyage across the Pacific in so small a vessel—for she can't be very large to have got through that gap in the reef."

"Perhaps the gap has been slightly filled in since the wreck has lain there," said Mark; "but the galleons of those days were very small craft compared with modern vessels. Why, Drake's ships, in which he performed his boldest exploits, were vessels of seventy-five tons, and a galleon of a hundred tons was reckoned a veritable monster. They were indeed brave fellows in those days."

"Well, as I have told you, Mendana never saw the Solomon Islands again, and for over two centuries they were a geographical will-o'-the-wisp. Adventurer after adventurer set out to seek them, and discovered islands to the north, south, east, and west that were believed to be the Solomon Islands, but this particular archipelago was invariably missed.

"In 1605 De Quiros set out from Peru for the third time in search of the mysterious Isles of Salomon, and discovered the Taumacos, now known as the Duff Group, and afterwards landed on Espiritu Santo, the largest of the New Hebrides Islands; but he did not succeed in finding this group, that he had visited forty years before in company with Mendana. The brave old mariner, though disappointed, was not disheartened, for he devoted himself to the task of organising yet another expedition; but in 1614, just as he was preparing to start across the Pacific for the fourth time, he died.

"A century elapsed before the next known attempt to find these islands was made by Admiral Roggewein, a Dutch navigator, in 1722; but it was again unsuccessful. In 1765 Commodore Byron, an Englishman, essayed to rediscover Mendana's famous but discredited El Dorado, but he too failed, as did his countryman, Captain Wallis, in the following year.

"But at last the time had arrived for the mystery to be solved. In 1767 Captain Carteret sighted the southernmost points of the Island of Malayta, which, however, he believed to be separate islands, and he did not identify them as part of the Solomons until he had returned to England. Then followed Bougainville in 1768, De Surville in 1769, and at last the Isles of Salomon were actually discovered, and La Perouse, D'Urville, D'Entrecasteaux, and others came soon after and completed the exploration of the group."



## CHAPTER XLII.

### ANOTHER THEORY.

"WELL, Mark," said Harry, "before we decide whether you have established your case, I will ask you to listen to a theory I have formed with reference to the wreck."

"Oh, here's th' other one again' it now," interjected Gridley. "When's my turn comin'?"

"You may have your turn now if you like," said Harry good humouredly; but the storekeeper shook his head, and the younger brother proceeded.

"Just before we left England I noticed an account in one of the London newspapers of an expedition that was being fitted out to go in search of a valuable treasure that it was stated had been buried on one of the islands of the Pacific. The coincidence that we were setting out on a somewhat similar quest created an interest for me in the very romantic narrative, and I cut it out of the paper and placed it in my pocket-book, intending to show it to you, Mark. But I forgot all about it until you began telling us the history of these islands. Here it is," said Harry, taking a newspaper cutting from his pocket-book. "Shall I read it?"

Mark and Gridley assented, and Harry read as follows:—

"During a revolution in Peru, in 1823, a number of wealthy residents of Lima combined to charter a vessel of three hundred tons, on which they placed their property in money and jewellery, a large quantity of monastic plate

being also sent off for safety. It is said there were doubloons to the value of two millions sterling and a large quantity of very valuable plate placed on board. The intention was to convey the treasure to Spain. After the treasure was on board, however, an Englishman, a lieutenant in the Peruvian service, was informed of the intended flight by the lady of his affections, and when the owners of the treasure went down to the harbour to embark, they were dismayed to find that the lieutenant, with a chosen band, had "cut out" the vessel within hail of a Peruvian man of war. The bold pirate steered right across the Pacific, and the next that was heard of him was his arrival at Honolulu in an open boat with a single companion. It is surmised that quarrels arose among the pirates, and that so many were killed or murdered that it became impossible to navigate the vessel, and that she was accordingly beached on some island and the treasure buried, after which the lieutenant and his comrade made for Honolulu, where they represented themselves as the survivors of a shipwreck. At Honolulu the lieutenant chartered a schooner to go to the island to recover the treasure; but one evening, as he was sitting on the lee rail chatting with his companion, he either fell or was pushed overboard and was drowned. In overhauling the lieutenant's effects the captain of the schooner came upon a chart of the island on which the treasure was hidden, and thus he became apprised of the object of the voyage, but the name of the island was not given, nor was latitude or longitude marked; in fact, the map was useless until the island to which it referred was discovered. The captain, therefore, seized the remaining pirate and compelled him to promise to reveal the place where the treasure lay hidden. When the schooner arrived off a group of islands that the man had indicated, a boat was lowered, but the pirate, instead of stepping into it, pushed off the

boat from the side of the schooner and dropped feet first into the sea. He never re-appeared, and thus died the only person who could furnish the clue by which the treasure could be recovered. It is almost needless to say that the island to which the pirate had directed the schooner corresponded in no respect with the chart found among the lieutenant's effects, nor was the captain's persevering search throughout that group and among the adjacent islands rewarded by the discovery of any trace of the stolen treasure."

"There, what do you think of that?" said Harry. "I haven't read it all; but the rest relates merely to the fitting out of an expedition to search for the treasure."

"Waal, mister, I s'pose I'm ter be judge 'tween yer," said Gridley; "an' I mus' say I kinder cotton most ter yer yarn, 'cause it don't kerry us back quite such a long piece as yer brother's. Yet I can't say as how I kin rightly see heow a three hunderd tonner could a got hrough that narrer openin' oppersite the wreck."

"That is certainly a flaw, but not a very serious one, in Harry's theory," observed Mark, "for in a high sea a vessel of almost any burthen might be driven through that opening."

"Why, boss, yer argyin' on th' other tack," exclaimed Gridley. "How'm I ter decide atween yer ef yer chops an' changes about like thet yerself?"

"I haven't exactly changed my opinion yet, Mr. Gridley," rejoined Mark; "but I'll admit I shouldn't like Harry's theory to prove to be the correct one, for, though the amount of the treasure is stated to be two millions' worth of doubloons and a large quantity of plate, I have no doubt that the 'heirs, executors, administrators, or assigns'—as the lawyers say—of the persons from whom the treasure was stolen could be found, in which case we should have to disgorge our wealth."

"Phe-e-ew!" whistled Gridley. "Yer'd be tarnation green ef yer did."

"At any rate, there's no necessity to argue that aspect of the question at present," said Mark; "we haven't secured the two millions yet, and the chance of our doing so seems rather remote. But Uncle Richard described the wreck as having a lofty stern and bluff bows; how do you make that fit in with your theory, Harry?"

"I'm afraid that upsets my theory altogether," admitted the younger brother, "for, though the ships built during the first quarter of this century were not quite such models of naval architecture as the *Taniwha*, for instance, still they were not furnished with towering poops like the galleons of Drake's time. But I'm not exactly satisfied that your idea either is the correct one; it seems altogether too improbable that a ship's hull should lie at the bottom of the sea for nearly three centuries and remain practically intact."

"Heow'm I ter settle this yer case," drolly protested Gridley, "ef both of yer knuckles under like this? Why don't yer argy up ter yer idees, an' knock th' other's notion inter bits? Thet's the style ter kerry the verdick."

"Perhaps it will be as well to ask you, as judge, to reserve your decision until we can get a look at the wreck ourselves," said Mark, entering into the storekeeper's humour. "If we had known that Koroko would not set out to-day on the journey over the hills we might have gone down the coast to the wreck."

"Haven't we time to do so yet?" asked Harry.

"Yes, mister, ye could go down," replied Gridley; "but it'd be long arter sundown when yer got back."

"Besides, Harry," observed Mark, "we must turn in early to-night. We had no sleep last night, and we shall require all our strength for to-morrow's journey, which even Koroko describes as 'plenty much hard work.'"



## CHAPTER XLIII.

### AN INLAND JOURNEY.

BEFORE sunrise the following morning all Napuka was astir, and the final preparations for the journey over the hills were rapidly completed.

Koroko had arranged for a band of about sixty of his bravest men to accompany the expedition; indeed, he would have taken twice that number had not Mark dissuaded him, for a portion of their route traversed Mionkono's territory, and that redoubtable chieftain had of late seldom visited Napuka, so that Koroko deemed it unwise to trust implicitly in his nominal friendliness.

The brothers and Gridley having breakfasted, equipped themselves with a rifle and a brace of revolvers each, besides providing several lengths of rope to assist them in descending over the cliffs into the glen, a number of axes, and an ample stock of tobacco with which to reward deserving natives.

The sun had just risen, and the heaving sea gleamed like a mass of molten gold as the party, resembling a Cyclopean reptile, wound from among the huts and commenced the ascent of the low hills behind the village.

Mark, Harry, and Gridley marched with Koroko at the head of the procession, the warriors following one behind the other in single file. The young chief astonished the brothers by the truly wonderful degree of knowledge he exhibited of the habits of the various birds, animals, and

insects that were observed, as well as by his explanations of the nature and characteristics of the different trees, shrubs, and plants that hemmed the path. This intimate acquaintance with so many of Nature's secrets was the more curious inasmuch as some of the things described were apparently of no use whatever to the islanders; but it seemed that the natives acquired the knowledge by life-long observation, animated by an insatiable desire to take advantage of Nature's lavish bounties and to utilise them to the utmost.

Onward and upward proceeded the expedition, the white men frequently stumbling and slipping, the rough coral rocks outcropping here and there, interspersed with patches of volcanic formation, making the travelling very slow and fatiguing, added to which the path was continually crossed by slender but tough creepers, that tripped up the wearers of boots and often threw them sprawling upon the ground.

The scenery amid the forest was bewildering rather than beautiful. The first impression upon entering the shade of the thick woodland was one of relief and pleasure at escaping the dazzling glare of the tropical sun, but before long the brothers were conscious of an oppressive sensation, produced doubtless by the subdued light, the faint, sickly odour of decaying vegetation, the close steamy atmosphere, and the almost death-like silence that prevailed.

The tall banyan and almond trees shot up to a great height, their branches interlacing overhead and completely excluding the direct rays of the sun, while the trade wind, that so pleasantly tempered the heat of the atmosphere along the coast, could not penetrate beyond the topmost foliage, the air beneath being still and humid.

Under the avenues formed by the tallest trees were



palms, tree ferns, and brilliantly tinted undergrowth of various descriptions, and from branch to branch trailed parasitic vines and climbing plants, the entire forest appearing to be draped in a gigantic veil of vegetable lacework.

As Koroko had warned his friends, the journey proved both long and tiring, for several detours had to be made to avoid descending into ravines, the natives entertaining a pronounced aversion to travel along a path commanded by any higher ground in the vicinity. Thus it became necessary to call a halt when the summit of the range had been attained, as the sun was high in the heavens and the demands of hunger had to be satisfied.

As for Mark, Harry, and Gridley, the climb had not so much stimulated their appetites as it had exhausted their strength and tried their temper, so that they desired rest more than food, and, while the natives were feasting and chattering, they reclined upon a grassy mound beneath the shadow of a spreading fig tree.

The spot selected for the noonday camp was on Mionkona's territory, and scouts were posted on all sides to give warning of the approach of any hostile band; but it seemed at first that Koroko's precautions were unnecessary, for no alarm disturbed the Napukans while they were enjoying their well-earned refreshment.

When, however, the order was given to resume the march, one of the scouts returning to the camp came upon a native hiding in a thicket, and he was brought to Koroko, who interrogated him closely:

"Hello!" exclaimed Gridley; "here's a pretty go! The fellow's a head-hunter. He don't belong to none o' the tribes o' this place."

"How does he come to be here then?" asked Mark.

"That's just the mystery, boss," replied Gridley; "let's see what Koroko thinks about it."

"What place belonga this fellow?" inquired the storekeeper of Koroko.

Koroko looked perplexed, and glanced uneasily into the jungle surrounding the little glade in the midst of which they had encamped, as if expecting the attack of a formidable foe.

The young chief, before replying to Gridley, again questioned the captive, and after a time his answers appeared to relieve Koroko's apprehensions, for he turned to the storekeeper and said something that made Gridley give a prolonged whistle expressive of astonishment.

"By the stars an' bars, pardners, this here's just the rummest start I ever ha'rd on. Who d'yer guess is right here in the mountains? Who d'yer reckon hes ter be foun' 'way inter the middle o' this yer islan'?"

"What! has Snape escaped into the interior after all?" cried Harry.

"No, 'tisin't Snape," replid Gridley triumphantly; "thet head-hunter feller ses thet Biratala es a pris'ner at Miokona's place."

"Who's Biratala?" asked Mark.

"Oh, I know," exclaimed Harry excitedly; "it's Uncle Richard! Don't you remember, Mark, that Mudge told us that Kerewa called uncle 'Biratala'? It's the nearest they can say to Birtle."

"Does that native really mean that Captain Birtle is alive, and that Miokona is keeping him a prisoner?" inquired Mark in an equally excited tone.

"Thet's what he ses," replied Gridley.

"What is to be done?" asked Mark anxiously. "We must rescue him without delay."

Gridley explained the situation to Koroko, who did not know Captain Birtle, as the young chief had been kidnapped before the trading station was established



at Napuka. He, however, readily understood the position of affairs, and speedily elicited from the captive head-hunter everything that was to be known.

It appeared that on an occasion when Birara and a large party of his tribe had gone northward with a dancing party, Miokona had seized the opportunity, and, with a small body of picked warriors, had crept stealthily into the village in the early morning and captured Captain Birtle and young Tolo, the rescued head-hunter, intending to loot the store and probably to kill and eat the trader and his slave.

It happened, however, that the *Bonito* had arrived off Napuka during the night, and when the day broke the appearance of the schooner close to the entrance greatly alarmed Miokona and his men, who hastily carried Captain Birtle and Tolo away into the hills, so that it should not be known that they had attacked the store.

The trader and Tolo fully expected to be killed and eaten, and the sudden misfortune must have unsettled Captain Birtle's reason, for the young head-hunter described him as acting and speaking in a most extraordinary manner. However, Captain Birtle's affliction seemed to have inspired Miokona and his tribe with superstitious dread, for they regarded him as possessed of an evil spirit (*nito paitena*), and this caused them to refrain from sacrificing him and his slave, though they kept him closely confined, and for a long time would not permit Tolo to leave the village.

When the brothers fully understood the circumstances in which their uncle was placed, they unhesitatingly accepted Koroko's offer of the services of his tribe to compel Miokona to deliver up his prisoner. Mark earnestly hoped to avoid bloodshed, but he felt equally justified in employing the Napukans to rescue Captain

Birtle from captivity, as he had in objecting to the natives being embroiled on account of Snapé's possession of the treasure.

Messengers were at once despatched to Napuka, summoning the entire fighting power of the tribe, and until the reinforcements arrived Koroko and his party remained encamped on the summit of the hill.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### A BATTLE.

THE first detachment of the reinforcements arrived at the camp late the same evening, and with them came Captain Freeling and his men, who had readily volunteered when they understood that the expedition was to be undertaken to rescue a white man who had been carried off by the mountain tribe.

The remainder of the fighting force of the Napukans joined their comrades early the following morning, and among them the brothers were astonished to observe a large number of women; but Gridley informed them that the women invariably took part in all engagements on land, their appointed duty being to carry the reserve weapons; but they generally became so excited that they joined in the conflict, and often distinguished themselves by their reckless daring and ruthless cruelty.

When the entire force had assembled, Koroko divided them into three parties, one consisting of about twenty of the most experienced warriors, with whom Mark, Harry, and Gridley acted, and two bands of about a hundred men each, between whom Captain Freeling and his men were apportioned.

Koroko's plan was to advance cautiously towards Omaka, as Miokona's village was named, the small party leading and acting as an advance guard; and when within a short distance of Omaka, to despatch one of the large

parties by a circuitous route to approach the village from the opposite side, while the main body attacked Miokona's stronghold in front.

The little army had advanced slowly and warily for about two hours, when one of the advance guard uttered a whispered exclamation of caution, and immediately the whole force was halted. Thrusting his long spear downward, he had discovered a skilfully-laid pitfall, that had been dug and covered with grass and leaves. It was the work of a very few minutes to strip off the covering, disclosing a deep pit, into the bottom and sides of which sharp bamboo spikes had been placed, that would have inflicted dangerous if not fatal wounds upon any unfortunates who had fallen into the trap.

This discovery aroused the advance guard to increased vigilance, and before long other pitfalls and dangerous traps were detected.

Mark had a very narrow escape, indeed he would have been killed had not Koroko been marching close behind him. The elder brother had very imprudently gone in advance of the islanders, and in pushing his way through what seemed to him nothing but tangled undergrowth, he had attempted to wrench asunder a very tough tendril that crossed the path. Before he knew what had happened, he found himself pinned on both sides by spears, whose points would have met in his body had not Koroko promptly dragged the young man backwards to the ground, and thus released the strain upon the cord stretched across the track and fastened to two spears that had been concealed in the tall grass.

This incident convinced Koroko that Miokona had in some manner become aware of the attack with which he was threatened, for the pitfalls were but ordinary and permanent precautions against the approach of an unwelcome visitor; but the young chief recognised the



spear trap as a special contrivance, that had been but recently placed in position, and he accordingly cautioned the advance guard to be on the alert to detect an ambuscade, and to warily search for other impediments.

It was not long ere the wisdom of Koroko's caution became apparent, for the natives had scarcely advanced a quarter-of-a-mile when one of the leaders uttered a cry of pain and fell to the ground, the blood streaming from a deep gash in his foot, caused by a razor-like stake of bamboo that had been driven into the path, and upon which the injured man had inadvertently trodden.

Many such dangerous obstacles were discovered and removed, consequently but slow progress was made, so that it was past noon when the Napukans gained the crest of a hill commanding a view of the eminence on the summit of which Miokona's village was built.

Up to this time not a strange native had been seen, and had the newly-laid snares been absent, Koroko would have imagined that his advance had not been perceived; but when he peered cautiously from amid a thick clump of bushes towards Omaka he noticed many signs of preparation.

A few men could be seen moving about near the huts, but none wandered far away, nor was a woman or child to be seen. Every tree and bush had been cleared away for fifty or sixty yards from the huts, so that there was no possibility of an enemy approaching dangerously close without being observed, and the Napukan chief had little doubt that many scouts were posted to watch for his approach.

Gratified rather than dismayed at the prospect of a conflict in which skilful strategy would be requisite to avert defeat, and the most clever tactics would be necessary to achieve the victory, Koroko remained for some time studying the contour of the surrounding hills and

elaborating his plan of attack, and his confident bearing as he returned to the glade where the white men and the subordinate native leaders had been awaiting him, inspired them all with enthusiasm."

Koroko explained his scheme in a few words, and it met with general approval, the brothers especially regarding it favourably, as it appeared to afford a possibility of a conflict being entirely obviated.

That, however, was not Koroko's thought, much less his desire.

Orders were at once given for the two large bodies of Napukans to set out in opposite directions, the one to the right and the other to the left of the hill upon which they had halted, the advance guard remaining encamped on the crest of the hill, almost in view of the enemy.

Noiselessly the two bands of islanders moved off, keeping well under cover and taking routes that apparently led away from Omaka, and shortly afterwards a dozen of the advance guard disappeared stealthily into the undergrowth, while Koroko and his friends narrowly observed everything that went on in Miokona's village and awaited the development of events.

In about an hour one of Koroko's scouts re-appeared as silently as he had vanished, bringing with him a native belonging to Miokona's tribe, who had been captured as he was watching the movements of one wing of Koroko's little army.

The prisoner evidently expected to be put to death, if not to be tortured, and his surprise was beyond expression when he found himself kindly treated, and when Mark presented him with a stick of tobacco; but he was yet more astounded when Koroko allowed him to depart after giving him a message for Miokona, demanding the immediate release of Captain Birtle, under a threat of burning down his village and exterminating his tribe.





The Napukans had not to remain long in suspense as to the character of Miokona's reply to their peremptory demand. They watched their messenger as he crossed the cleared space and entered the village, and a few moments afterwards an excited mob of natives rushed from among the houses and yelled defiance in the direction of the hill where the scout had told them the coast tribe were concealed.

Koroko had anticipated this result, and as the shouts re-echoed across the valley, he and his warriors and the white men boldly showed themselves, scattering over the crest of the hill so as to appear more numerous than they actually were.

Omarka became instantly alive with warriors, who streamed out of every hut, and assembled in front of the village facing the Napukan camp, shouting, yelling, and gesticulating defiantly, while others belaboured a great drum and made hideous noises on conch shells.

Koroko addressed a few words to Gridley who, lying prone upon the ground, took deliberate aim at the crowd of Omakans and fired; the shot took effect, for one of the natives gave a shriek of agony and fell into the arms of one of his comrades.

The panic among the Omakans when they saw their comrade fall was indescribable. They had heard wonderful accounts of the power of the white man's rifle, but no weapon of which they had any actual knowledge was effective at such a long range. They scarcely paused to drag the wounded man under cover, but fled precipitately into their huts.

Their consternation, however, must have been still greater when they found that even under the shelter of their thatched walls they were not safe from the terrible weapon their enemies were using against them, for Gridley continued firing, and though some of his bullets probably

fell short, many of them took effect on the nearer huts, from which there was speedily a panic-stricken stampede.

The noise of the firing and the sound of the drum alarmed Miokona's scouts, who were noticed as they dashed into the village from different points of the surrounding clearing; but all were not able to reach their home unmolested, for Koroko's spies brought into the camp three of the enemy's men, and one of these was sent with a second message to Miokona, informing him that unless he immediately delivered up Captain Birtle the most terrible fate awaited him and his tribe.

There was no defiant response to this threat, but neither was there any sign of submission. However, Koroko's scheme had thus far succeeded to perfection, and the young chief and his friends confidently awaited its completion.

Gridley continued dropping occasional bullets into the village, chiefly with the object of keeping Miokona's attention directed towards the camp, and presently Koroko uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he pointed away to the west of the village, where a thin column of smoke had just risen above the trees.

Leaving Gridley to maintain the firing from the hill—half-a-dozen Napukans remaining to act as his guards, and, if necessary, as guides—Koroko, the brothers, and the advance guard descended at the back of the hill and then advanced cautiously towards Omaka.

They had scarcely taken up a position amongst the jungle on the north side of the clearing, when Koroko, pointing to the hill they had recently quitted, exclaimed:

“Plenty much fight pretty soon!”

Mark and Harry looked upward and saw another thin column of smoke, which was an answering signal to a third token of readiness that Koroko indicated away to the eastward.



The young chief, with the patience that able generals oft-times lack, paused a few minutes before giving the final signal, to afford the different portions of his force breathing time and an opportunity to remedy any omission. Then, with a clear, ringing voice, he shouted the Napukan war-cry—

“Tala-tala-so-orti!”

The signal was immediately repeated on every side of the clearing, and the thrilling war-whoop rang out with the force of hundreds of powerful throats. Then the rifles having poured in a volley, the Napukans left the cover of the jungle and dashed up the slope towards the enemy's huts.

The attack was well planned, but it was scarcely to be expected that a chief of Miokona's reputation for prowess could be easily defeated. His men were sorely disheartened by the white men's guns, but in Solomon Islands warfare there is no thought of surrender. The vanquished are invariably sacrificed, so that even the greatest cowards are afraid to show the white feather.

The Omakans, therefore, awaited the onslaught with a bold front, their women shouting and encouraging them and abusing their assailants.

A shower of stones and arrows was poured in among the Napukans as they advanced, to which the attacking party were unable to retort, for they could not discharge their missiles effectively up-hill. Thus they were eager to come to close quarters, but to do so they had to face a steady rain from the Omakan slings and bows, and, as the coast tribe closed up, the deadly spears came into play.

But the last of Miokona's traps had yet to be surmounted. The Napukans had gained the comparatively level ground upon which Omaka stood, their ranks having been thinned, but their numbers being still formidable, and they were preparing to make a simultaneous charge in

among the enemy, who had retreated to the shelter of the huts, when Koroko's warriors discovered that the ground was strewn with prickly palm branches, the thorns of which penetrated their naked feet and legs and caused intense pain. There was no alternative, however; the space separating them from the enemy had to be traversed, so, bravely disregarding the agony of their wounds, they dashed forward to the attack.

Had the coast tribe not been supported by the white men, the conflict would have been long and sanguinary; indeed, as it was, the village for a time seemed the abode of a legion of howling and shrieking demons; but when the rifles and revolvers commenced to bear, the Omakans were unable to stand up against such death-dealing weapons, and in half-an-hour from the moment when Koroko uttered his war-cry the village was in the hands of the Napukans who enjoyed the sport of driving the enemy backward and forward across the thorn strewn ground before finally taking them captive or killing them.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### RESCUED.

WHEN the Napukans found themselves in full possession of Omaka, the brothers experienced great difficulty in restraining the savage instincts of their allies, who were eager to torture and kill all their prisoners; but Harry prevailed upon Koroko to forbid the cold-blooded butchery, though his followers bitterly resented being cheated of what they regarded as their rightful privilege, and there were many Omakans who perished by sly thrusts and stealthy blows.

As for the cannibal feast with which the Solomon Islanders invariably celebrate their victories, Mark and Harry found that no arguments or dissuasion would prevent the Napukans from this indulgence, though, as a mark of especial favour, Koroko promised Harry not to take a prominent part in the orgies.

The fortunes of war had been entirely on the side of the Napukans, for they had come upon Miokona when a large party of his fighting men were absent from Omaka on a hunting expedition, and the mountain chief himself had the misfortune to be one of the first among the wounded, a bullet crippling his right arm just before the Napukans entered the village. The injury was not serious, but it had been sufficient to deprive the Omakans of Miokona's inspiring leadership.

It was perhaps fortunate for Captain Birtle that Miokona

was placed *hors de combat*, for the brothers were informed that he had threatened, if the Napukans entered the village, to drag the white man forth and to kill him before their eyes. But Miokona well and Miokona wounded were very different men. The helplessness of the bold chief aroused Mark's pity, and he begged Koroko that the captive should not be harshly treated.

As soon as the brothers had appeased their consciences by counteracting as effectively as was in their power the bloodthirstiness of the whilom gentle Napukans, they went in search of their uncle, Tolo, who had attached himself to Mark, leading the way.

It was indeed a painful sight that met their gaze when they were able to distinguish, amid the gloom of the gathering shades of evening and the comparative darkness of the squalid little hut, the recumbent form of their uncle, Captain Birtle, his clothes hanging about him in rags, his hair and beard long and unkempt, his nails claw-like, and his flesh grimy with dirt. But sadder than all was the unintelligent glance with which the miserable captive turned towards his nephews. There was no flash of joy, no gleam of recognition, no expression of wonder or curiosity—nothing but an impassive gaze, from which all hope was absent and but the faintest trace of reason remained.

Mark and Harry exchanged glances, expressive of profound pity, and the elder brother, kneeling beside the bed of leaves on which his uncle lay, said :

"We have come to save you, Captain Birtle. We are your nephews—your sister's sons."

But the trader only muttered some words in the native language, which Tolo understood, and he hastened away to procure food and drink.

In the meantime, Mark and Harry tenderly lifted their unfortunate relative and carried him to a cleaner and more



commodious hut, though none of the native houses at Omaka could compare with those of Napuka, the coast tribe being remarkably clean and orderly in their habits, and much of their time being spent in swimming and bathing.

The brothers, when Captain Birtle had partaken of a hearty meal, endeavoured by every expedient they could devise to arouse their uncle's interest and intelligence ; but they were obliged to confess, when they sought the leafy couches that Tolo had prepared for them, that they had completely failed, and that, so far as they could judge, Captain Birtle had entirely lost his reason.

Gridley took scarcely so despondent a view of the case.

"See here, pardners," he exclaimed, encouragingly, "'pears ter me yer uncle's bin kep' mighty low ; thet cuss Miokona hes just gev him 'nough grub ter keep body an' soul tergether, an' he's kep' him inter that dirty ole hut till anybody'd a took leave o' the'r senses. Soon's yer git the Capt'n back ter the store yer'll see him brighten up."

Captain Freeling was of the same opinion. He assured the brothers that he knew of a sailor who had been carried off by the Waikato Maoris and detained for several years, who temporarily lost his reason, but who completely recovered when he was once more afloat.

Mark and Harry were not very hopeful, but they resolved that no time should be lost in taking Captain Birtle away from the scene of his captivity, so with the very earliest peep of day they were moving, and they urged Koroko to return at once to Napuka.

The natives, however, were inclined to be indolent after the fatigues and feasting of the previous day, so that the morning was well advanced before a start was made for the coast, and night was closing in when Napuka was reached.

A litter had been provided for Captain Birtle, but the

brothers were agreeably surprised to find that their uncle's feebleness was more apparent than real, and that the food, of which he had partaken so ravenously, had literally set him upon his legs again.

The route for the most part was an easy decline, and the pace adopted by the Napukans was quite leisurely, so the trader was able, with the occasional assistance of his nephews, to walk down to the coast.

Mark watched anxiously for some sign of awakened intelligence when his uncle came in sight of the sea, but his hopes were unrewarded by any symptom of increased consciousness. Again, when the party entered the store, they hoped that old associations would in some measure arouse Captain Birtle's interest, but again they were doomed to disappointment.

Throughout the day the trader had scarcely uttered a word, except occasional demands for food and drink, which were spoken in the native dialect; nor had the brothers been able to induce their uncle to speak in his own language, though they had addressed questions to him and had mentioned the names of persons with whom he had been familiar.

When the evening meal had been disposed of, Mark, Harry, and the storekeeper began discussing plans for the future, the attack upon Omaka having completely upset the arrangement for the visit to the inland entrance to the cave.

"Tell yer what, pardners," remarked Gridley, "thar's no time ter be wasted. Them hill tribes'll git tergether an' give us no end o' trouble ef we don't git this business over right away."

"We'd better start again, then, to-morrow morning, if Koroko is willing," said Mark.

"I reckon we'd better," assented Gridley. "I'll go over an' see what Koroko hes ter say about it."



"Shall we be away more than two days?" inquired Mark.

"It's onsartin," replied the storekeeper; "it all depends whether we kin git inter the cave right away an' whether we can git at the gold."

"Gold! Gold! Gold! It's mine! I'm a rich man! I'm the richest man in the whole world."

The words were shouted with increased vehemence by Captain Birtle, and the brothers and Gridley, who had not been observing the trader, were greatly startled by the sudden outburst.

"Tell yer what 'tis, boss," whispered Gridley, "we've dropt kinder promiskus on ter the key ter yer uncle's mind. Ef we turn it the right way, I reckon we'll git his knowledge box fixed right up pretty slick."

Captain Birtle had relapsed into his former condition, apparently quite unconscious of what he had said.

"What shall we do?" anxiously inquired Mark.

"What do you say to showing him some of those articles from the wreck?" suggested Harry.

The brothers thought they perceived a faint gleam of intelligence in their uncle's eyes when Harry uttered the word "wreck," and this encouraged them to hope that something tangible connected with the wreck might have the effect of arousing the slumbering intellect.

Mark, therefore, adopted Harry's suggestion, and, going into the inner room, returned with a golden vase.

"See," he said, holding it so that the light fell directly upon it, "this gold was obtained from the wreck."

The effect was magical. Captain Birtle's eyes slowly assumed a look of the keenest interest, and, dashing forward, he seized the vase, which he closely examined.

"It's gold, right enough!" he exclaimed. "Did you say it came from the wreck? Why, who are you? It's mine! The wreck's mine! I'm a rich man! I'm the richest man in the whole world!"

And once more the clouds seemed to close round the afflicted man's intelligence.

The brothers were bitterly disheartened by this failure, but Gridley felt confident that, the means of arousing Captain Birtle's interest having been discovered, by careful treatment the intervals of reason would gradually increase.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### MENS SANA IN CORPORE SANO.

IT was manifest to Mark and Harry the following morning that the night's repose had materially improved their uncle's condition. His eyes no longer displayed the lack-lustre expression that had so painfully impressed the nephews, and his movements exhibited a degree of intelligence that encouraged the hope that before long the trader's reason would be perfectly restored.

It had been arranged with Koroko to set out again on the expedition over the hills to the glen, but Mark was loth to absent himself from his uncle, yet he agreed with Gridley that to take him back among the hills would probably retard Captain Birtle's recovery.

Harry, therefore, proposed that another experiment should be made to stimulate their uncle's intellect, and he suggested that they had committed a mistake the previous evening by being present and so distracting Captain Birtle's attention while he examined the vase. So it was arranged that several pieces of gold plate should be placed on the table in the store and that the trader should be left to himself while he examined them.

This plan was carefully carried into execution, the brothers conducting their uncle to the door and then anxiously awaiting the result.

They were astonished and dismayed when they failed to hear any exclamations similar to those Captain Birtle had

uttered the previous evening; but they were astounded when, in a few minutes, their uncle re-appeared at the doorway and demanded—

"Hello, young fellers! What're you doin' here?"

Neither of the nephews ventured to reply. They dreaded that by some unfortunate expression they might recall the terrible look of vacancy into their uncle's eyes.

"Come, I say, give an account of yerselves," exclaimed Captain Birtle angrily. "What are you hangin' about the store for? No good, I'll warrant."

Mark hastened to explain, fearing that the excitement would be injurious to his uncle.

"We came ashore some days ago from a labour trader," he said.

"There's bin no labour trader here for months," retorted the captain. "You're not tellin' me the truth."

"Indeed we are," protested Mark. "Ask Mr. Gridley."

"Who's Mr. Gridley?" demanded the trader furiously.

"Hold on a bit, pardners," interposed the storekeeper in an undertone. "He don't rec'lect me as 'Mr. Gridley'; we hadn't no misters aboard the schooner. He'll know me as 'Judd' right away, I guess."

"What're ye mumblin' about there?" roared Captain Birtle. "Why can't you say what's brought you here?"

"Easy thar, cap'n," said Gridley quietly. "Don't you 'member Judd, as got yer safe outer thet scrimmage over ter Pongawa?"

"Hello, Judd, my man; is it you?" exclaimed the trader heartily. "Why, what's brought you here? The *Bonito* ain't here. Surely you haven't left her?"

"Yes, cap'n; I just hev," replied Gridley. "I thought I'd like a spell o' keepin' store, so I kem ter relieve yer, ef yer willin'."

"Willin'!" exclaimed Captain Birtle. "There isn't a feller I ruther have to manage this station for me. The



*Bonito* 'll be back in a day or two, an' I'll be glad to leave you alone in your glory."

"He doesn't rec'lect nothin' that's happened sense he was kerried off," whispered Gridley to Mark. "He 'spects the schooner to show up in a day or two. That's what he was waitin' for when he was took."

"Here, Judd, tell us who the young fellers are," exclaimed the trader. "Are they friends o' yourn?"

"Yes, cap'n," replied Gridley; "an' I reckon they'll be friends o' yourn before long."

"How's that?" asked Captain Birtle in surprise. "They won't tell me what's brought 'em here, an' they say they landed from a labour trader, when I know no labour trader's bin here for months. Labour traders knows a thing worth two o' that nowadays. Birara'd make it pretty hot for any labour trader as showed up here."

"Waal, cap'n, ef yer must know," said Gridley, deliberately, "these youngsters hes just called ter pay the'r respec's ter the'r uncle, Cap'n Birtle."

"Their uncle!" exclaimed the trader. "Are you Mark Derrison?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Then, why in creation didn't you say so before?" cried Captain Birtle. "An' is this a brother o' yourn?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Give us yer han's, boys. You're welcome to Napuka," exclaimed the trader heartily. "But how did you get here? That's what I can't make out."

"You have been ill, uncle," said Mark cautiously; "and we have been very anxious about you."

"Been ill, have I? Why, I never felt better in my life," protested Captain Birtle. "An' now you've got here—though I can't for the life o' me tell how you got here—we'll soon put things to rights, an' when the *Bonito*

comes along we'll get away to Sydney and then back to old England."

"Waal, I guess we'd better hev some breakfast afore we start," jokingly interjected Gridley.

"Yes, Judd; so we had," assented the trader, as he turned and entered the store, followed by the others.

When Captain Birtle caught sight of the pieces of plate on the table, to the brothers' consternation the bewildered expression returned to his eyes; but the trader turned to Mark and said—

"Seems to me, young man, you've been playin' some sort of a joke on an old feller. Where do them things come from?"

"They came from the wreck, uncle," replied Mark nervously.

"From the wreck!" repeated the captain. "Then you've bin a-gropin' under water while I were laid up, have you? I couldn't make out how them things came here when I found 'em just now."

There was still an accent of doubt in the trader's voice, which became increasingly manifest when he asked Mark—

"But how did you manage to get here so soon? It's on'y about two months since I wrote to yer mother, an' I told her not to open the packet for a year."

"You forget, uncle, that you have been very ill," replied Mark. "Harry, show Uncle Richard his letter."

Harry produced Snape's pocket-book, and drew forth the document.

"See, uncle, it is nearly a year and ten months since you wrote this letter," said Mark. "Here's the Brisbane post-mark, and here's the Bristol stamp, and to-day is, I believe, the 26th of November."

"Have I been ill all that time?" cried Captain Birtle in amazement.

"Nearly all that time, I'm afraid, uncle," responded Mark.

"Well, that's strange ; for I never felt better in my life," exclaimed the trader. "Are there many o' them things?" he asked, pointing to the plate.

"Yes, uncle—a large chestful," replied Mark.

"By Jove! then we're rich, boys, an' no mistake." And suddenly remembering the treasure, Captain Birtle asked, "What have you done with the money?"

"It's still in the cave," answered Mark, afraid to explain the actual circumstances of the case.

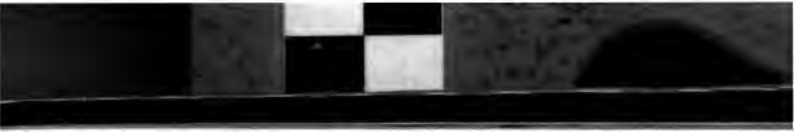
"That's right, boys," said the trader approvingly. "You couldn't do better'n leave it there till you're ready to put it aboard the *Bonito*."

"Waal, boss, hedn't we best hev breakfast?" interposed Gridley, to avert any further embarrassing questions.

While the meal was being discussed the brothers were overjoyed to notice that their uncle's manner became increasingly self-possessed and intelligent—so much so that when Koroko came to inquire whether they were ready to set out on the journey over the hills they no longer hesitated to acquaint Captain Birtle of the obstacle that prevented them from gaining access to the cave.

For a moment the trader looked aghast at the prospect of losing the treasure, but his old indomitable spirit soon re-asserted itself, and he exclaimed confidently—

"Never fear, boys; we know where it is, an' we'll not be long in findin' a way o' gettin' at it."



## CHAPTER XLVII.

### A PERILOUS TASK.

CAPTAIN BIRTLE did not entertain a very hopeful anticipation of the result of the inland journey, but he submitted to be guided by the opinion of the others, who assured him that the tunnel connecting the two caverns was completely blocked, and that the only way to obtain ingress to the grotto where the treasure was hidden was by way of the cliff-encircled glen.

The party on their way over the hills encountered none but natural obstacles, and arrived at the summit of the cliffs early in the afternoon.

The crater into which Captain Birtle had penetrated was, however, no longer a glen; it was a lake. The waters of the cascade still fell over the rocks, and, the outlet through the tunnel having been dammed by the overturned stalagmite, a capacious reservoir had been formed.

"It's out o' the question to think o' gettin' into the cave from this side," said Captain Birtle. "The cave's full o' water as well's this place. We'll have to get at it from th' other side somehow."

"Ef the water's inter the cave 'twon't be none too safe ter shift thet stopper outer the tunnel anyway," remarked Gridley.

"It won't be safe, nor it won't be easy," admitted the trader; "but we'll have to do it."



"If we had some blasting powder, or some of that newly discovered explosive they call dynamite, we might manage it," said Mark.

"An' p'raps bring the entire consarn down about yer ears, mister," objected Gridley.

"There's no use discussing what might happen if we had blasting powder," said the practical Harry; "we have none, so we must do the best we can without it."

"Don't go too fast, nephew," observed Captain Birtle to Harry. "I told Simmonds to bring me some blastin' powder or dynamite to blow up the wreck. P'raps he brought it, and p'raps it's stowed somewheres in the store."

"Well, uncle, if it's procurable, I vote for it being used," said Harry. "It seems to me the only safe way of draining the water out of the cave. If anyone in the tunnel succeeded in moving that stalagmite he would be drowned to a certainty."

"Thet's so, mister," assented Gridley; "but s'pose the blast shakes down more staggetites, or whatever yer call 'em, an' blocks up the tunnel worse'n ever?"

"That's a risk we must run," replied Harry.

"Yes, nephew," said the trader; "I agree wi' you. We must drain the cave at whatever risk; for if the water was out we could get at the money from this side, even if the place did tumble in."

So the party returned to Napuka, arriving there early the next day.

The search in the store resulted in the discovery of two canisters of blasting powder and a coil of fuse, and with one canister and a length of fuse the trader, his nephews, and Gridley at once proceeded down the coast.

At Kanaputa a fresh surprise was in store for Captain Birtle, for his nephews had not deemed it advisable to inform him of the narrow escape there had been of his treasure falling into the hands of Snape and Mudge.

When, therefore, the canoe shot under the natural archway into the little haven, and the *Taniwha* could be seen lying there snugly at anchor, the trader exclaimed—

“By Jove! somebody’s found his way in here. Wonder what’s his little game.”

“Oh, that’s our brig, uncle,” explained Mark; and then he gave an account of Snape’s knavish attempt to seize the treasure.

Captain Birtle became greatly excited as he listened to the outline of his nephews’ adventures, and he warmly grasped Gridley’s hand as the young man recounted the manner in which the brig had been trapped, while he angrily exclaimed when Mark described how Snape had been swept away—

“Serve the precious scoundrel right if he does come to an untimely end. The niggers down south’ll eat him if they ketch him.”

The party landed on the beach and at once made their way without difficulty up the ravine and through the cave to the mouth of the tunnel, where they paused to decide who should go forward to put in the blast.

All volunteered to undertake the task, but Captain Birtle protested that it would be better for him to go alone, as he had had experience of blasting in his gold digging days.

To this proposal neither Mark nor Harry would consent for it was evident the service was one of danger, and each claimed the right to participate in it.

“See here, pardners,” said Gridley, “I’m a man wi’ou chick nor child dependin’ on me. It don’t matter ef I’m blowed up er washed down; thar’s nobody ter miss me. Sides, I’ve engineered this sort o’ thing afore, an’ I’d ruther play a lone hand on this game.”

Mark and Harry could not claim experience in the work, but they strenuously opposed either of the elder men



undertaking the perilous task alone; and so the unselfish contention went on until it seemed that, as no one would give way, the whole party would enter the tunnel.

But that unwarrantable risk was averted by Gridley's sensible argument, that so many would be in each others way in the event of a hasty retreat being necessary, so it was eventually agreed to settle the matter by drawing lots.

Four fibres having been taken from one of the torches, it was arranged that those who drew the two longer ones should remain in the cave, while those who drew the two shorter should enter the tunnel and put in the blast.

The lots were drawn, and the dangerous duty fell to Captain Birtle and Harry.

Without further delay the trader and his young nephew made the necessary preparations and went forward along the tunnel.

Arrived at the end, the captain, after a careful examination of the walls of the tunnel, decided to put in the blast at the side of the stalagmite, as the comparative softness of the rock at the spot selected suggested that a moderately powerful explosion would make a fissure sufficiently large to drain off the water without incurring the danger of shaking down the roof of the cavern.

Captain Birtle's rough and ready geology proved accurate, for he experienced little difficulty in driving the marline-spike he used as a drill into the rock, and within an hour-and-a-half—that seemed an eternity to Mark and Gridley, whose anxiety became more and more intense as the minutes rolled on—the drill had been made, the powder inserted and tamped, and the fuse ignited.

Harry was unable to render very active assistance, but he held the torch at a safe distance from the explosives, while he watched his uncle's proceedings with the liveliest interest.

The moment before the match was applied to the fuse,

Captain Birtle ordered Harry to commence his retreat along the tunnel, and when the young man, after proceeding a few yards, glanced back, he noticed that the fuse had begun to fizz and sputter in an alarming manner, and his uncle came rushing towards him, shouting—

“Cut along, boy, that fuse’s got precious dry, an’ burns ever so much faster’n I thought it would; we’ll have our work cut out to get out o’ this afore it goes off.”

Uncle and nephew hurried forward, and made good progress while the height of the tunnel allowed them to walk upright, but, as the distance between the roof and the floor diminished, their movements became hampered by the stooping posture they were obliged to assume, and, to make matters worse, Harry stumbled and fell, relinquishing his grasp of the torch, which was extinguished, and the tunnel was plunged in darkness.

“Never mind the torch,” cried Captain Birtle, “let’s get out o’ this as quick as we can. ’Twould take longer to find it an’ get it alight agen than it’s worth.”

So they groped their way along, and at last perceived a faint glimmer in the distance that they believed was the mouth of the tunnel. But the light rapidly grew stronger, and proved to proceed from a torch in Mark’s hand, the watcher’s uneasiness having caused them to disregard their agreement and start in search of their comrades.

“Thank God! you’re safe!” exclaimed Mark, when he saw Captain Birtle and Harry.

“We shan’t be safe till we’re clear out o’ this,” retorted the trader. “Cut along as hard as you can,” and they all hastened towards the outlet.

About forty yards of the tunnel remained to be traversed when they were startled by the reverberations of the explosion, and at the same instant a rush of air extinguished the torch and threw them flat on their faces.

Again the tunnel was left in utter darkness, and as the



disconcerted men struggled to their feet and resumed their flight, they heard behind them an ominous roaring and hissing that, while it assured them of the complete success of Captain Birtle's blast, in making an outlet for the pent-up water, at the same time conveyed the terrible warning that, unless they succeeded in escaping from the tunnel before the torrent overtook them, they would inevitably be drowned or buffeted to death amid the turbulent water.

The appalling danger seemed to weight their limbs with lead as they entered upon this race for life and crawled painfully forward on hands and knees. Had they attempted to walk, even bowed almost to the ground, it would have been impossible in the darkness to avoid the irregular projections from the roof of the passage, which at this part was very low.

The steady blast of cold air blowing upon their backs, convinced them that an aperture of considerable size had been made by the explosion, through which a large volume of water was rushing, and they momentarily dreaded to feel the first surge of the hurrying torrent around them.

Gridley led the way, followed by Mark, then came Harry, and the trader brought up the rear. The store-keeper and the elder brother were remorseful that they had disregarded the agreement, for, had they remained at the mouth of the tunnel, not only would their torch have been a beacon to the captain and Harry, but the retreat would not have been retarded by the presence of two additional fugitives.

Loud and louder grew the roaring and splashing, and at the very instant when Gridley emerged from the tunnel the water swept down upon Captain Birtle and dashed him against Harry.

In a moment their bodies became firmly jambed in the tunnel, forming a human breakwater that enabled Mark to

crawl safely out into the cave, where he found the store-keeper hurriedly lighting one of the spare torches.

Mark and Gridley momentarily expected Harry and the captain to appear, and, thrusting the torch into a crevice in the rock, they stood at the mouth of the tunnel anxiously waiting to assist their comrades.

The position of the captain and his young nephew was extremely critical. As the pressure of the water, rapidly gathering behind them, increased, they both recognised that a simultaneous effort—the one pressing forward, while the other stood fast—was necessary to extricate them from their perilous predicament; but each wished the other to escape, for they felt that the one left to the mercy of the flood would certainly perish.

This generous indecision involved the loss of much valuable time, and it is doubtful whether either would have voluntarily given way; but the force of the arrested torrent soon became irresistible, and, Harry's frame, being the weaker, succumbed.

He was swept onward like a cork by the surging flood, and he would in a few moments have been dashed to pieces down the rocky bed of the creek had not Mark seized him as he issued from the tunnel, and, by a powerful effort, swung him clear of the rushing water.

In another instant, Captain Birtle's form shot out from the tunnel amid the seething cataract. Gridley, standing with one leg in the water, dashed forward and clutched the trader by the collar of his coat, but the strength of the torrent overpowered the storekeeper, and carried him off his feet, and the two men were whirled away down the foaming stream and disappeared in the shadows of the cave.

For a moment the brothers stood aghast at the terrible fate that had overtaken their uncle and friend, then Harry seized the torch and, followed by Mark, hurried frantically

along the course of the creek, shouting "Uncle! Uncle! Gridley! Gridley!" at the top of his voice, in the vain hope that he would be heard above the roaring of the torrent.

Soon the entrance to the cave came in view, resembling the piercing eye of some fabled monster, and the brothers saw the water bursting into a fountain of spray as it encountered some obstacle in the bed of the watercourse.

"They can't have escaped with their lives if they've been dashed against those rocks," shouted Harry into Mark's ear.

A sorrowful shake of the head was Mark's mute reply.

Still the brothers hastened forward, hoping even against hope, the light increasing as they approached the entrance, within fifty yards of which the stream, that had maintained an unswervingly straight course from the mouth of the tunnel to this point, took a sudden bend to the right.

Harry still carried the torch, holding it high above his head, while he strained his eyes gazing at the turbulent waters, the glare of the daylight from the opening rendering it difficult to see any object clearly.

As the brothers turned to follow the new direction of the watercourse, Harry stepped aside to avoid a dark mass that seemed to him a large boulder, over which Mark, who was close at his brother's heels, stumbled and fell.

"Here they are, Harry!" shouted Mark as he scrambled to his feet and bent over the dark object Harry had mistaken for a stone. "Fetch along the light."

But Harry had not observed Mark's fall, nor had he heard his brother's shout; so Mark was obliged to hurry after him and conduct him back to the spot where the bodies lay.

Thrusting the torch into the loose sand, which at this place formed the floor of the cave, Harry assisted Mark

to tenderly raise first Gridley—whose hand still firmly grasped the collar of Captain Birtle's coat—and then their uncle, both men being cold and insensible.

Anxiously the brothers sought to discover whether either had sustained a fatal injury, though it seemed scarcely possible that they had been hurled along down that rushing torrent without suffering terrible mutilation.

Harry devoted himself to Captain Birtle, while Mark attended upon Gridley, and to the young men's astonishment and unbounded joy, they could find neither serious wound nor broken limb; indeed, beyond a few painful, but comparatively trivial, abrasions, the unconscious men appeared to have escaped uninjured.

The very force of the current had borne them along so rapidly that it had preserved them from sinking and being dashed against the rocky bottom of the creek, but the rushing, tumbling, seething waters had buffeted them about and tossed them hither and thither so violently that they had lost consciousness and were in imminent danger of being drowned, when the momentum gained in the undeviating descent from the mouth of the tunnel carried the bodies directly forward—while the torrent eddied away to the right—and grounded them on the shelving sand, where they were found.

The brothers' efforts to restore Captain Birtle and Gridley to consciousness were prolonged, but eventually proved successful; and, though both men were terribly shaken and exhausted, they were not seriously injured.

But even when the captain and the storekeeper had recovered consciousness, the adventurers' troubles were not at an end. Slowly and painfully the elder men, supported by Mark and Harry, trudged to the outlet, only to find their exit completely cut off by the rushing stream, that at this point encountered a ridge composed of several large boulders embedded in the sandstone,





which caused the waters to bound upward in a fountain of spray.

The situation was extremely critical, for Captain Birtle and Gridley stood in urgent need of rest and nourishment to re-establish their strength, whereas the prospect of escape from the cavern seemed very remote, as several days would probably elapse before the accumulated water drained off.

The ingenuity of every member of the party was impotent to overcome this obstacle until, at Gridley's suggestion, the brothers rolled a number of loose stones, with which the floor of the cave was littered, into the stream just above the ridge of boulders. Gradually an artificial breakwater was constructed, from which the torrent glanced diagonally, thus adding to the force of the stream on one side but diminishing it on the other.

Patiently the brothers toiled until they had diverted a sufficient proportion of the current to render it safe for them to step into the water behind their barrier, and, disregarding the deluge of spray, to climb over the ridge of boulders.

Mark then took his stand in the water just inside the cave, while Harry obtained a firm footing in the stream on the outside, and thus they were able to assist Captain Birtle and Gridley to pass, with many an agonising effort, through the opening, and once more, with heartfelt thankfulness, to find themselves in safety beneath the canopy of heaven.

The shades of evening were fast closing in as the adventurers took their places in the canoe, and the natives, whose superstitious horror of the place was as keen as ever, were not slow in paddling out of the bay, but it was quite dark before they reached Napuka.



## CHAPTER XLVIII.

“ONALAU I”

THE treasure-seekers waited two days before returning to Kanaputa, but even then they found no perceptible diminution in the volume of the stream issuing from the cave. On the following day, however, there were signs of the pressure decreasing, and on the fourth day Captain Birtle said there was no more water coming down than he found when first exploring the caverns. Still it was considered advisable to defer yet another day the search for the treasure, to allow the walls and roof of the cavern to drain.

The brothers took the opportunity thus afforded, and, accompanied by Captain Birtle, proceeded down the coast to the place where the wreck lay. Their object was not primarily to ascertain whether Snape had secured everything of value, but rather to seek evidence as to the identity of the vessel, Mark still adhering to the view that it might prove to be Mendana's lost ship, the *Almiranta*.

The captain's description of the hull lent colour to this theory, but Mark desired to have the question settled beyond the possibility of doubt.

The weather was beautifully fine, and the sea calm but for the never-ceasing procession of huge, sluggish undulations that broke lazily upon the reef. As they paddled down the lagoon the canoe seemed floating in the air, so translucent was the water, while the sun, approaching its



meridian, illumined every aqueous glade and grotto, and bathed the iridescent marine jungle in its radiance.

Mark's hopes were fated to disappointment, for he found when he peered beneath the waves at the wreck that Snape's exploitations had resulted in the removal of the whole of the deck planking as well as the woodwork of the lofty poop. There remained a small portion of the richly-carved and ornamented stern, but no name or symbol by which the vessel could be identified; nor at the bows was there a figure-head.

"The mystery, then, will ever remain a mystery," said Mark, regretfully; "but I think you must admit, Harry, that this wreck is not the remains of the Peruvian vessel that the English lieutenant ran off with in 1823. This is not the hull of a ship of three hundred tons."

"No," pronounced Captain Birtle, "she wasn't much more'n a hunderd or a hunderd an' twenty tons."

On the sixth day after their escape the adventurers re-entered the cave, traversed the tunnel without much difficulty, and passed through the opening effected by the explosion into the second cavern.

Captain Birtle had succeeded admirably in gauging the force of the blast, for, while it had rent the rock and provided a capacious outlet for the imprisoned water, it had not disturbed a single stalactite.

It was the work of but a few minutes to remove the *débris* that had accumulated at the entrance to the grotto in which Captain Birtle had deposited the treasure, and soon the golden hoard was lying before them, recovered after a second submersion.

The brothers were astounded at the sight of so much gold, which far exceeded their most sanguine dreams.

"I reckon, pardners," exclaimed Gridley, "yer'll be kinder able ter disburse that sum of one hunderd dollars

yer agreed ter give me, an' then yer won't 'zackly hand over yer bottom dollar anyhow."

"You shall have your hunderd dollars, Judd," responded Captain Birtle heartily, "an' a few hunderds more atop of it. You've bin a reg'lar brick, that's a fact, an' any promises my nephews has made I'll double."

Three journeys were necessary to transport the whole of the treasure to the canoe, and then it was taken on board the *Taniwha*, where the brothers thenceforth took up their quarters.

Captain Freeling and his crew joined the brig the next morning, and the little vessel was at once got under weigh and was towed up to Napuka by three of Koroko's largest canoes.

The chest containing the plate was put on board, as were Mark and Harry's boxes and other impedimenta, and the *Taniwha* was only waiting for Captain Birtle to set sail for Australia.

The captain, however, was engaged deciding a momentous question, namely, whether circumstances justified him in appointing Mudge as successor to Gridley and placing him in charge of the store.

The trader had conceived a strong liking for Gridley and he had propounded to himself a variety of schemes for improving the American's fortunes; but the project which commended itself most favourably to him was one that would be difficult of accomplishment unless a reliable substitute could be at once installed at Napuka.

Captain Birtle had sounded the members of the *Taniwha's* crew, but none of them cared to take up his residence among the Solomon Islanders, who had never ceased to regard Captain Freeling and his men as enemies, and the trader had begun to think of abandoning his idea when Mudge volunteered to assume the position.



Going aboard the brig the captain explained his plan to his nephews.

"You see, boys," he said, "I'm goin' home wi' you, an' I ain't at all certain that I'll ever come back to this side o' the world. Maybe I will; maybe I won't. Howsomever, seems to me that Judd's the very man I want to carry on the tradin'. He knows every station in the islan's, an' he knows all the agents. I'm thinkin' o' takin' him along to Sydney wi' us an' makin' over to him a share o' the business. How does the idea strike you, boys?"

"Nothing could be better, uncle," replied Harry enthusiastically. "I'm sure you will find Gridley straightforward and honourable, and he deserves well of all of us, for I don't know what we should have done without his assistance."

"I cordially approve of your proposal, uncle," said Mark. "Harry and I have spoken several times about what should be done for Gridley, but your project is far preferable to any of ours."

"But you see, nephews," continued Captain Birtle, "there's the difficulty o' gettin' someun to take the store. 'Twon't do to leave it, an' it'd delay us a long time to wait here for the *Bonito*. None o' Freeling's men'll take it, an' on'y that rascal Mudge is willin'."

"Mudge!" exclaimed Mark. "Does he want to remain here?"

"Seems so," replied the trader. "He's offered to stop."

"He's afraid to go back with us to Australia," remarked Harry. "He thinks we'll prosecute him for theft."

"Well, boys," demanded Captain Birtle, "what shall we do? Shall we let Mudge stop?"

"Oh! yes, uncle," answered Mark. "I don't think Mudge is bad at heart. He wouldn't have robbed us, I'm sure, if Snape hadn't tempted him."

"Very well then," observed the captain. "Now we've en'y got to see whether Judd's agreeable."

When Captain Birtle's proposition was communicated to Gridley he looked incredulously from the trader to the young men to discover whether the offer was seriously intended or whether a joke was being indulged in at his expense.

"See here, boss," he said, addressing Captain Birtle; "do yer mean it, honest Injun? 'Taint no 'have' nor gammon?"

"No, Judd," replied the trader. "If you're agreeable I'm ready to give you a fourth share o' the business, includin' the *Bonito* and the stores on the islan's."

"An' I'm ter boss the entire show—ter run the hull consarn?" Gridley inquired, still entertaining grave doubt as to Captain Birtle's earnestness.

"Yes, Judd," the trader responded. "You've proved yer pluck an' honesty, an' as I'm goin' back to England wi' these youngsters I want someun to look after the trade. You're just the man. Will you do it?"

"I'll do it, boss. Yer may derpend on me."

So it was arranged, and Gridley quickly packed his belongings and went aboard the brig, while Mudge took up his quarters in the store, his box and other possessions that were on board the *Taniwha* being sent ashore.

Gridley noticed that Mudge received the assistance of Airini, one of the belles of Napuka, in transporting his goods to the store, and when Koroko went aboard to bid his friends good-bye the mystery of Mudge's sudden determination to settle on the island was explained.

It appeared that, with the perversity for which the sex is famous, Airini had scorned the admiration of half the warriors of her tribe and had bestowed her affections upon the lank, loose-jointed, goggle-eyed white man.

"Well, I cannot commend Airini's taste in manly beauty," said Mark.

"Couldn't a happen'd better, boy," protested Captain



Birtle. "Soon's he buys the gal he's as good as admitted to the tribe, an' Koroko'll take care he ain't killed an' eat like th' other man we had here."

Koroko received a supply of beads, tobacco, axes, knives, buttons, bottles, and other things that made him the wealthiest chief in the islands, and Bebe was decked with brilliant necklaces and gorgeously arrayed in garments of elaborately-designed print, that for the time concealed similar patterns of Manchester origin with which the skilful tatooer had embellished the graceful form of the island beauty. Nor was old Birara forgotten, and the men, women, and children of Napuka became temporarily insane as Captain Birtle's largess was distributed amongst them, so that the *Taniwha* was towed out of the lagoon and set sail for Sydney amidst shouts of joy, to which succeeded the plaintive farewell cry:

"Onalau! Onalau!"

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

### HOMEWARDS.

THERE is little more to relate.

The *Taniwha* arrived at Sydney in due course and the legal formalities conferring upon Judd Gridley a fourth share of Captain Birtle's business were executed, Mark and Harry, to the young men's great surprise, being at the same time constituted Gridley's "pardners," as he had so often addressed them, the captain himself retaining an equal share.

The business having been thus satisfactorily concluded, Mr. Fletcher produced a packet in an official envelope addressed to "Mr. Mark Derrison, care of Messrs. Bannatyne and Fletcher, Hunter Street, Sydney," which he handed to the elder brother, who, with much curiosity, broke the seal.

As he glanced over the contents of the packet he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and when he had completely mastered the purport of the documents he was horror-stricken.

"It's from Snape," he said, in a low voice. "He was sorry he robbed me and begged my forgiveness."

"What! has he been arrested?" exclaimed Captain Birtle.

"He's dead," replied Mark.

"Dead!" echoed the trader. "Then how did he come to write to you?"





"Here's a statement by the captain of the schooner *Mistral*," said Mark, "to the effect that a canoe was picked up in latitude 11°23 south, longitude 163°42 east, in which was found the dead body of a white man, whose identity was established by a scrap of paper, addressed to me and signed "Nathaniel Snape," that was taken from the man's pocket. It is in pencil and is scarcely legible, as he seems to have been very feeble when he wrote it. He expressed his sincere repentance for having murdered Kerewa, and planned to murder Mudge, and robbed me, and his hope that I would forgive him."

"What a terrible fate!" exclaimed Harry, pitifully.

"Poor fellow!" said Mark. "I wish we could have saved him. He more than expiated his crimes."

"Waal, I don't know, pardners," interposed Gridley. "I'm real sorry fer the critter, but p'raps it's best as 'tis anyway. It saves yer the bother o' prosecutin' him."

"We wouldn't have prosecuted him," said Mark. "His utter failure was sufficient punishment. But I intend to try to have those inhuman scoundrels, Pugsley and Crudden, punished. We must not leave Australia until we have exposed the atrocities practised by the labour traders, so far, at any rate, as our experiences aboard the *Polly Hopkins* have enlightened us."

"Was it the *Polly Hopkins* you shipped on at Brisbane, Mr. Derrison?" inquired Mr. Fletcher, excitedly.

"Yes," replied Mark.

"Then there's some more dismal news for you," said Mr. Fletcher. "A man of war fell in with a vessel of that name the other day off the coast of Queensland. I remember the circumstance well, the condition in which the kanakas were found was so horrible."

"What! Did a man of war overhaul the *Polly Hopkins*?" asked Harry.

"Yes," replied Mr. Fletcher.

"Then, we need trouble no further, Mark," observed Harry.

"But the authorities may require our evidence to convict Pugsley and Crudden," suggested Mark.

"No; your evidence will not be necessary," remarked Mr. Fletcher, meaningly. "But wait a moment, and I will find the paper in which I read the account. It was only a few days ago."

In a few minutes Mr. Fletcher returned with a file of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, from which he read the following paragraph:—

"H.M.S. *Albicore*, which arrived yesterday at Brisbane from a cruise among the New Hebrides and the Santa Cruz Islands, reports having, on the 10th inst., about fifty miles off the Queensland coast, to the South of Mackay, fallen in with the schooner *Polly Hopkins*. When Lieutenant Prentice boarded the schooner he found fourteen emaciated islanders and the decomposing bodies of eighteen other natives. There were no white men on board. The schooner was drifting about, the sails were bent, and the helm was lashed down. No provisions or water could be found on board, and the islanders were perfect skeletons in appearance from want of food. Lieutenant Prentice endeavoured to elicit from the natives some particulars to account for the abandonment of the schooner, but none of them could articulate distinctly, the only word that could be understood was 'Solomon,' from which it is believed the islanders belong to the group of that name. A crew was put on board the *Polly Hopkins*, and she may be expected to reach Brisbane in a few days."

"Here is another paragraph relating to the same vessel," said Mr. Fletcher.

"It will be remembered that H.M.S. *Albicore* reported a few days ago having fallen in with the labour schooner



*Polly Hopkins* on the 10th inst., about fifty miles off the coast of Queensland, South of Mackay, with fourteen emaciated islanders and the decomposing bodies of eighteen natives on board. The schooner, under the command of Lieutenant Prentice, arrived in Moreton Bay yesterday, and we understand that an interpreter has elicited from the surviving natives an account of the circumstances under which the vessel was abandoned. It seems, according to the statements of the islanders, that the captain and mates of the schooner ill-treated the kanakas, who seized an opportunity when several of the crew were aloft to attack the officers, killing them all and throwing their bodies overboard. The islanders appeared to have assured the crew that they would not kill them if they would take the schooner back to their island. The men, however, secretly placed all the provisions and water in the boat and attempted to steal away from the schooner, but they were detected by the islanders, who swamped the boat by casting pieces of ballast into it. All the crew were drowned or killed in the water, and many of the natives subsequently perished of starvation. The name of the captain of the *Polly Hopkins* was Simon Pugsley, and Robert Pillinger and Joseph Crudden were the mates, Crudden also acting as recruiter. An official inquiry will be held."

"I reckon, pardners, thar's nothin' ter pervent yer startin' fer England right away," said Gridley.

"That's so, Judd," observed Captain Birtle. "Them rascals seem to have got what they deserved. But I'm sorry for Pillinger; he wasn't at all a bad sort, on'y he couldn't agree wi' Simmonds."

"If we were to prepare a statement of the atrocities we witnessed on board the *Polly Hopkins*, wouldn't the authorities take action upon it?" inquired Mark.

"It would have very little effect, I'm afraid, Mr.

Derrison," replied Mr. Fletcher. "Such statements have been published again and again, and nothing has ever been done. Besides, there's nobody to punish in this case."

"At any rate, I shall consider it my duty to bring the matter under the notice of the Home Secretary, when I get to England," persisted Mark.

"And your letter will be curtly acknowledged and pigeon-holed, and that will be the last you will hear of it," rejoined Mr. Fletcher discouragingly.

"Waal, pardners," exclaimed Gridley, "I'm real sorry to lose yer, but I reckon yer'll not be long afore yer looks us up in these parts agen an' settles down ter be reg'lar beachcombers."

THE END.



## APPENDIX.

### OUTRAGES IN THE NEW HEBRIDES.

*London Daily News, 30th January, 1889.*

Letters received at Plymouth from H.M.S. *Opal*, Captain D. H. Bosanquet, one of the ships serving on the Australian station, announce the arrival of that vessel at Noumea, from a visit to the New Hebrides Islands, where she has been engaged in inflicting punishment on the natives for a series of murders and other outrages on British and French subjects. A victim of one of these outrages was a Swede named Costa, who had been living on the island of Api, one of that group. He was in a boat with some natives when it capsized. The Swede, with two of his companions, clung to its bottom, and they drifted to the Island of Paama. They swam to the shore, and were immediately attacked by the natives, who killed and brutally mutilated them, and their hearts were torn out, roasted, and eaten. In another case, a French half-caste living on the island of Api killed two natives, who during his absence had stolen a woman with whom he had been living. In revenge for this the other natives murdered him and burned his place to the ground. It was also reported to Captain Bosanquet and the members of the Commission for the dual control of the New Hebrides that vessels flying the British and French flags had been fired upon by the natives, and some of the crews either

killed or wounded. In one case the Government agent was shot through the leg. In another case a boat of the schooner *Helena* was treacherously fired at by the natives after a friendly interview ashore for trade purposes, and Mr. Heath, the mate, was killed. Another man was so dangerously wounded that he was at once conveyed to Noumea and placed in the hospital. These and other outrages following on the recent murder of Mr. Lee Walker, an Englishman, at the village of Pentecost, where he had gone to trade with the natives, determined the Commission to take active measures for the punishment of the offenders. Accordingly her Majesty's ship *Opal* and the French corvette *Fabert* undertook the duty. Proceeding first to the island of Pentecost, they sent a message to the offending natives calling upon them to give up the murderers of Mr. Walker; it was known that between twenty and thirty men were guilty. As no satisfaction could be obtained from the natives, the *Opal* on the following morning commenced a heavy bombardment of the place, pouring in nearly thirty filled shells from the 64-pounder guns, and nearly 200 rounds from the Nordenfeldts. Neither the natives nor their houses were in sight, all being completely hidden in the thick bush; but there is no doubt that immense damage was done by the bursting of the shells. On a subsequent day the *Opal* and the French corvette *Fabert* proceeded together to the village of Taviac, about a mile from Si, in Ambrym, the scene of the outrage on the schooner *Helena*. The French landed about fifty men and the English about seventy sailors and marines, but on approaching the village through the bush from different parts they discovered that the place was completely deserted. Rifles, tomahawks, tobacco, beads, and other articles were found in the huts and taken possession of, and then the whole village, consisting of seventy or eighty huts, was set fire to and completely destroyed,



together with some banana and yam plantations. After this the *Opal* proceeded alone to Paama, about seven miles distant, and bombarded the village there with shells and bullets, but, as at Pentecost, the villagers had already disappeared into the bush. The *Opal* then left for Noumea, where she arrived on the 4th ult. The white traders who accompanied her on her bombarding expedition are of opinion that a wholesome lesson has been taught to the natives. They hope that it will put a stop to the outrages, which have been so frequent for a long time past that the schooners trading among the islands have not felt it safe to call anywhere.

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